



“Strive to Enter”
Luke 13:22-30

Idea: Entrance into God’s Kingdom is narrow.

Intro: Alistair Begg is the senior pastor of Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio. You have probably heard his Scottish accent on the radio. He is a great expositor of God’s Word. His preaching and teaching ministry, Truth for Life, can be heard on over 1,800 Christian radio outlets nationwide. Well, several years ago, Pastor Begg was in Cambridge, Massachusetts to preach in convocation at one of the seminaries. On that morning, he rose early and went to a restaurant next to Harvard Yard to put some finishing touches on his sermon. As he worked, he watched Cambridge wake up, and the restaurant filled up with a variety of weird and wonderful people. Some had slept in the street. Others were apparently regulars. He was out of his element. The university culture was overwhelming, and he felt insignificant. Setting there, he began to think about his insignificance and how foolish the gospel seemed in such a setting. He felt really small.

Two things happened that morning, however, that encouraged him. A sparrow landed on his table inside the restaurant, and as he looked in wonder at how the bird was indoors, Jesus’ words about sparrows in the Gospels flooded his thoughts. Then he looked across the aisle and saw an Asian girl intently reading what appeared to be a Bible. He watched further and saw that she was indeed studying the Scriptures, so he asked, “I see you are reading the Bible. Are you a Christian?” The young girl smiled and replied, “Oh yes. I have found the narrow way.”

Her answer was remarkable. Pastor Begg had never heard someone describe their testimony in those words before. Frankly, neither have I. The two of them began to talk, and the young lady shared that she had come from South Korea to study at Harvard and was the only Christian in her family. Pastor Begg was amazed by her story. Here she was 10,000 miles away from her Buddhist home with its three million gods, which is the antithesis of the “narrow way.” On top of that, she was engrossed in the aggressive pluralistic culture of Harvard University, which tolerates everything except the narrowness of the gospel. Despite those influences, she profoundly understood her Christian faith. Or perhaps, it was due to those influences that she expressed her faith with such unabashed acumen as “the narrow way.”

As you might imagine, the pastor was greatly encouraged that morning to preach the Word in convocation, and he did just that, calling people to the narrow way. The young Harvard student understood and had appropriated a Kingdom truth that is glossed over by so many, especially if they live in a friendly Christian subculture. She recognized that entrance into God’s Kingdom is narrow.

As we move forward to the next pericope in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus presents this great truth as an imperative for us to strive after.

Read Luke 13:22-30.

Inquiry: The Lord Jesus is not only announcing the Kingdom of God, but He is also urging people to enter it. Contextually, He is no longer in the synagogue. Luke tells us that He is traveling through towns and villages, journeying towards Jerusalem (vs. 22) where a cross awaits. His appeal for people to “*strive to enter through the narrow door*” comes in response to a question from an unnamed person who asked a great question. “*Lord, will those who are saved be few?*” We have no way of knowing what the intention was behind the question. Perhaps, it was asked with a smug, self-complacency. After all, the general understanding among Jews was that all Jews except the very worst would be saved. The *Mishnah* was explicit about this:

“All Israelites have a share in the world to come, for it is written, ‘Thy people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified.’ And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and that the Law is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean.” – Sanhedrin 10.1

It also possible the question was asked from a sincere heart who wanted to know the depth and breadth of God’s saving love.

Regardless of the disposition of the one who posed the question, the crowd who heard it expected Jesus to affirm the teaching of the *Mishnah*. They wanted to hear that eternally everything was alright with them. They also wanted to hear that all Gentiles would be excluded from the Kingdom.

The question was good, and it is one we should consider today. “*Will those who are saved be few?*” The answer is both relative and absolute. Relatively speaking, we know that many people have been, are being, and will be saved by Jesus Christ. We should, in every way, expect to see billions of people standing before the throne of God in the Kingdom. John saw “*a great multitude that no one could number*” (Rev 7:9). Yet, by comparison many more people will enter a Christless eternity. Jesus said, “*For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*” (Matt 7:13-14). The question is absolute in that there is only one way for people to be saved. The gate is narrow (vs. 24). Contrary to what people in a pluralistic culture today want to believe, Jesus is the one and only door that leads to salvation and the repair of a broken life (John 10:7-9). On top of that, the clock is ticking on this offer of salvation. Therefore, Jesus instructs each of us to strive to enter through this narrow door. There are three truths we need to consider.

1. Full access into the Kingdom is available today buy may not be tomorrow.

Read Luke 13:24.

The subject in this verse is an understood “you.” Jesus’ words assaulted His hearers’ complacency. He clearly informed them that “many”, meaning most of them, would not make it through the narrow door. They would not make it because the door was not open and available to them. It was. Jesus, as the Door, stood in front of them. Most of them would not make it because they refused to enter through the narrow door. For this reason, Jesus called them to consider their ways and make every effort to enter. They should not worry about what others may have thought. Instead, they needed to worry about themselves and the condition of their soul.

Jesus stood before them ready to grant full access into the Kingdom to anyone who would believe on Him for salvation. Two millennia have passed since this conversation, and the Lord’s appeal to sinners still stands. This invitation is still good today, but please hear me, it may not be tomorrow.

Read Luke 13:25.

Do you hear the urgent tone in Jesus' words? No one knows when the master of the house will rise and bolt the door shut. Time is limited. Therefore, no one has an infinite amount of time to respond to Jesus' offer of forgiveness and life.

This past Friday was the 30th anniversary of my dad's death. He was thirty-five years old, and he was in the prime of his life. I was fifteen years old and a sophomore in high school. My dad was a believer. He had trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior as a kid, but for many years he walked at a guilty distance. The brokenness that sin brings into a person's life and family were on full display in the home in which I was raised. My parents split up for a few months during the summer going into my freshman year. God used that season to break my dad's pride. I witnessed genuine revival break out in his life. That last year of his life, he made sure his family was in church each Sunday. He walked with God in a way I had never witnessed in him before. In fact, my last memory of my dad was seeing him reading his Bible before going to work that Wednesday morning. No one expected for him to be killed that afternoon in a work accident. While we did not anticipate it, we were never promised he would come home.

Life is like a mist that is visible one minute and gone the next (James 4:14). No one is promised a long life. Bad and terrible things happen in a fallen world. We all want to live a long life, but it is not promised. Most people would probably love to have opportunities to believe on Jesus all the way up to their death bed, but those are not promised either. At some point the master of the house shuts and locks the door of the gospel, closing out any further opportunities to believe and be saved. For this reason, strive to enter through the narrow door. The Kingdom is available today, but it may not be tomorrow.

2. Familiarity with the Kingdom is insufficient to grant access into it.

Jesus pointed out that those who had been shut out by the master asked to be let in the house. They said, *"Lord, open to us."* The master made it clear that he did not know where they came from even though they claimed to have enjoyed fellowship with him and to have listened to his teaching (vs. 25-28). The master then declared, *"Depart from me, all you workers of evil! In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out."*

Jesus was making the case that their perceived Jewish privilege had better make a spiritual difference, or it is all for nothing. The Jews' presumption put them in grave danger of a devil's hell. The presumption of salvation misleads many today in the professing church. There are religious people who can quote Scripture and explain the gospel. By all accounts, they look like Christians, but they have never come to saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Lord's words in these verses are not meant to inject fear and doubt into our minds about our salvation, but they should lead us to take a strong assessment of ourselves to see if we are indeed walking through the narrow door. A passing acquaintance with God is not the same as knowing God. There is an eternal difference between knowing about God and knowing Him personally. Familiarity with the Kingdom is insufficient to grant access to it. Therefore, strive to enter through the narrow door.

3. Fear of God's judgment should motivate entrance into the Kingdom.

Read Luke 13:28-30.

The judgment of God is a real and present danger. In this story, a door is shut, a verdict is made (*I do not know where you are from*), and a sentence is given (*Depart...place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*). God's judgment is just, though. Two complimentary things kept the people out of the Kingdom. First, they possessed no relationship with the master. Twice Jesus issued a categorical denial of relationship. The master did not know where they were from even though they claimed to

have known him. To him they were nothing but strangers. Second, they trusted in their superficial knowledge of the master. Their familiarity with God inhibited their fear of God.

Jesus frankly corrected their soteriology. Salvation comes to those who in faith have turned to Jesus and away from their sin. God's just judgment, on the other hand, rightly comes to those who have rejected Him, regardless of how familiar they may be with His ways. This judgment is a real place of torment. It begins in a place called hell (Luke 12:5). It will culminate in a place called the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). In both, there is weeping. I believe this weeping is partly due to regret. For all eternity, sinners will remember those moments when they knowingly and willingly rejected the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. It seems sinners will be able to see at least in part the beauty of heaven from the pits of torment (Luke 16:23). This image will torment sinners for all eternity. It is also a place of weeping because of the torment sinners will endure for all eternity. It will be a place of never-ending pain.

In both places, there is also gnashing of teeth, which speaks of fierce rage. While sinners will lament their failure to come to Christ, it will not lead them to repentance. Instead, it will create ongoing rage against Jesus and the believers they can see from their pit of torment. I think we like to equate the gnashing of teeth to demons who torment those who are in hell, and maybe that will happen on some level. I, however, believe the gnashing of teeth will be done by all sinners who out of hatred for God gnash their teeth at heaven like a bunch of rabid dogs.

Jesus' depiction of this hellish place and how people end up there was meant to motivate His Jewish listeners. In their minds, they were first in line to receive the blessing and rewards of the Kingdom. Their rejection of Christ, however, put them last. On the other hand, the few Jews and the later Gentiles who faithed into Jesus were granted entry into the Kingdom (vs. 30).

Do you have a healthy fear of God's judgment? Tragically, many people go through life as if hell is not their problem. Listen to this preacher today, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb 10:31).

Jesus was asked if those who were to be saved would be few. As we contemplate this question, we better make sure to strive to make sure that we are part of that narrow number. May the fear of God's judgment motivate us to strive to enter His Kingdom through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Yesterday, was a great day in college football. There were several top 25 matchups and stadiums were packed. My Razorbacks went down to LSU and into Death Valley. 102,000 Tigers and Hogs cheered on their teams from the stands. In the SEC, stadium size is a point of pride. After all, "it just means more." I think most people love a big crowd and to be part of something special.

One day, believers from all time and all nations will gather around the throne of God to worship Him together. It is going to be a glorious event. Nothing in this life can close to what that day will be like. That gathering of people will be so large no one will be able to get an accurate count. Unfortunately, the crowd in hell will be even greater. Therefore, we need to open our eyes and hearts to these three truths. Full access into the Kingdom is available today but may not be tomorrow. Familiarity with the Kingdom is insufficient to grant access into it. And fear of God's judgment should be a motivate entrance into the Kingdom.

Today, like the young lady in the Harvard Yard restaurant, can you say with full assurance, "I have found the narrow way?"