

²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, 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. 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!’

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.” (Luke 13:22-30)

Made to Fit

Lord, are only a few going to be saved? It’s bound to come up in Catechism class at least once a year. It almost always comes up when I have instruction classes with adults. It doesn’t surprise me when someone asks in Bible Class. We wonder, “How many will be saved?” and then the follow up: “Why are some saved and not others?” God’s Word makes it abundantly that he wants all to be saved. At the same time you know many reject this good news and, therefore, God’s gift of saving. Some will enter through the narrow door to eternal life. Will you? And if so, why?

Jesus is going through the towns and villages teaching on his way to Jerusalem. Along the way someone has this question on their mind: “**Lord, are only a few going to be saved?**” When Jesus responds, he doesn’t just say, “Yes” or “No.” For now, Jesus doesn’t want you to be concerned about them. Instead, he turns it back to you. You, “**Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to**” (v.24).

Parents will tell their children don’t worry about what your brother is or isn’t doing; you just worry about yourself. Like the nameless individual in Luke we can find ourselves caught up with what so-and-so is up to and how they are doing such-and-such. We wonder, why aren’t they in church? Where did they go? So easily we can feel almost overwhelmed by the decay and corruption of society, the bills being passed or not, the violence out there and all those bad things over here. What about them?

But Jesus isn’t talking about them; his focus is on you. You make every effort. This word was especially used for the Greek athlete who strive and struggle in training to compete in the competition. Our word “agony” comes from this word used in Luke. Jesus is telling

you, “Don’t worry about how many will be saved. Don’t worry about them. You strive. You strain and struggle. Do everything possible to make it through the narrow door and be saved. Many will try and will not be able.”

So how does one fit through this narrow door? Many in Jesus’ day believed it was simply because they were Jews and from the line of Abraham. They thought they were on the right list and the doors would be thrown open to them. Many still believe this in a different way. His name is listed there in that book of the baptized souls of the church. Never-mind that he rejected his baptism and lived a life of sin. His name sits there on the membership roster of church. Never-mind that he is just too busy to make time to be in the Word and at the Lord’s Supper. As long as his name stays on that list he might even be buried in that church and be part of that group too. Too often there’s the idea that a name on the church membership book equals your name written in the Book of Life. What a devastating shock this will be when he sees the owner of the house has closed the door. Left on the outside he will plead for him to open up but Jesus will say: **“I don’t know you or where you come from”** (v.25). Mere outward connection to Jesus does not equal entrance through the narrow door.

So how does one fit? She sits in the pews when she can make it and nothing else is planned. And you know what, she’ll even throw a good chunk of change in the offering plate whenever she does come. She’ll go to the Lord’s Supper when the spirit moves her, she happens to remember, or she feels like she probably should. She even has devotions at home on occasion. She points back to how she went to Catechism class back in the day or even went to the Lutheran school. She ate and drank with Jesus and she was taught by him. But, she’s really just doing this because this is what you are supposed to do. More or less she’s just going through the motions. She’s doing this to keep mom and dad off her back and keep Grandma from worrying about her. She knows what to say and how to say it. She can fool others, but God will not be mocked. She’s ready to go through the door holding onto all her baggage she has brought filled up with all that she did do. She might even admit that she could have done better and knows she should, but at least she did this! It should count for something, shouldn’t it?! Many will plead, **“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”** (v. 26).

So how do you fit? Maybe it’s because, in general, you are a good person. He tries his hardest to be decent. He tries to control his temper and have patience. He’s such a hard worker—at least mom and dad taught him what it means to work! He makes sure to stay away from the really bad sins. When someone needs help, he gives it. When it’s time to volunteer, he’s top of the list. He hasn’t cheated on his spouse. He does his best to not lie. But then he stands before that narrow door and finds that he doesn’t fit. How can this be? He sees Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When you read through Genesis, those three men did

some pretty terrible things; things that he probably never considered doing. And yet, they are in?! How is this possible? He's holding onto all of these bags of what he has done only realizing too late that all of his self-justifying, people-pleasing is keeping him from getting in! He hears the owner reply, **"Away from me, all you evil-doers"** (v.27).

You might be thinking of someone right now who fits these descriptions. But Jesus doesn't want you to try and read someone else's heart. He's telling me: look at your own. Jesus tells us to strive, make every effort to make it through the narrow door but instead are you looking for an easy road to heaven? Are you being a convenient Christian who knows the right things to say and will even do the right things when certain people are looking and noticing. Do you tell yourself that it's good enough? You don't need to be in bible study; you know enough already. You don't need to come to the Lord's Supper all that often because you don't really feel that much anyway. You'll make it to church when you don't have other things planned or other people visiting. Do you agonize over your sin? This doesn't mean that you just need to feel really bad about you did. To agonize means to strive and struggle against sin, to fight against it. Or, are you letting it stick around? Instead of breaking from the ways of the world, you find yourself trying so hard to explain why your situation is different. You tell yourself it's not that bad and others are worse. Do you make excuses and point at all the reasons for what you are doing—maybe thinking you have no choice!—instead of simply confessing and turning away?

The gate is narrow. You can't fit through it with a big head, full hands of sin and self-righteousness, with a heart that ignores sin and has little time for what God's Word says. Understand this all correctly: one does not earn salvation by striving and fighting; but one may certainly lose this salvation by not striving and fighting. What a terrifying thought should you stand one day, find the door shut to eternal life, and the one who knows all things has chosen to cut you out. It's gut-wrenching to imagine being left outside of heaven to weep in despair of complete loss and gnashing of teeth from the suffering, rage and helpless fury with no one to blame but yourself hearing Jesus say, "I don't know you."

So, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? **"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"

(v.29-30). God wants all people to be saved. He's going to bring them in from all over.

God does not take pleasure in the death in the wicked but desires that we might turn from our sin and live. The last will be first—there are those who will make it through and one might wonder, how is that possible? Think of the rotten, scoundrel that was the thief on the cross who Jesus told: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

So how do you fit through the narrow door? Jesus makes you fit. First, he crushes us of any hope that this is coming from us doing something. He needs to squash down any false

notions that we have that mere outward connection to Jesus is good enough. He deflates our pride in self and kills us so that he might raise us to life in him. He calls you to think about yourself personally; after all, that's what he did. Before the creation of the world, he chose you. Before you were a twinkle in your daddy's eye, he saw you through eternity as his own. Before your parents put your name on the birth certificate, he named you his own. In the waters of baptism, you were put to death with Jesus **in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life** (Romans 6:4). In those waters you were born again and the Father proclaims, "I know you. You are mine. Satan has no claim on you. You are my son and daughter and I have a place at my heavenly table just for you."

Jesus knows better than you do that you couldn't fit through that narrow door on your own. It was for your sins that he went to the cross. It was because of your sin that he is pierced with nails and crushed under God's just wrath. It was for your sins that he hears his Father say, "I don't know you" as his God forsakes him. He knows better than you do the debt of your sin; it his own blood that paid it. But that precious sprinkled blood on you speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. It cries out, "This one is forgiven. This one's sins cannot be held against him. This one, I know."

He reveals himself to you through His Word so that you see that way to eternal life is not from you striving and fighting. **He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.** He opens your eyes to see and tells you, "**I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved**" (John 10:9). He daily invites you back to your baptism and leads you beside those quiet waters to drown your sinful flesh. Confess your sin and he who is faithful and just forgives you. He invites you to his table where we get to have a taste of the heavenly banquet. Here we receive his body and blood with the bread and wine to forgive our sins. No one else can take communion for you; you take and eat, take and drink and be assured: "Jesus knows me. He's giving himself personally to me. This promise is for me."

Yes, the gate is narrow. But Jesus makes you fit. Through this Word, Lord's Supper, Baptism, forgiveness of sins he works not just for you, but in you to will and to act according to his good purpose to strive and struggle. He turns us from ourselves to better see this isn't just for me. He's working to bring in all the nations—from the north, south, east, and west—he wants them. Go and share it. Invite them. Show them. Love them. Jesus has plenty of room for them too at the feast in the kingdom of God. Amen.