

Strive

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[0:00] Luke 13, verse 24, Strive to enter in at the straight gate.

! For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. I want to talk through some various scriptures and talk about striving. Of course, as Christians, we know it's almost a two-fold thing.

There's a striving and there's a resting, isn't there? In Christ, there's a rest that we have. We can rest in the Lord. We can know His peace and the comfort that He gives to us, that we can have that wellness in our soul that we've just been singing about, can't we?

That it is well with our soul. We can rest in His salvation, that it's His work. But on the same token, there's also striving. It's almost like an opposite, isn't it?

Striving. But I'm more focusing on some Bible verses that talk about striving and how we can learn from those, I trust, as we look through them. And the Christian life is compared to like a wrestling match sometimes.

[1:13] And the wrestler needs dedication and discipline. Christian life is like a wrestling match because we know there's many verses that talk of that spiritual warfare that we're engaged in.

It's not so much the CIA that we're battling against, although that could be part of it. But it's the enemy of our soul. He's been battling against Adam right from the book of Genesis, right from the garden of Eden.

He's bent against us, the adversary of our soul. And the Christian life is meant to be a wrestling match against those powers that are arrayed against us, those spiritual forces in high places, those wicked forces.

And the question for all of us as Christians is, do we wrestle? Do we wrestle? Do we strive? Do we strive to do His will, to be about His business? Do we have that heart that wants to strive, to aspire to be about that which God would have us to do?

And do we take it really seriously enough? In the Word it says that Paul writes, Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

[2:22] It's a terrible thing. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if you're not prepared for eternity.

It's a fearful thing. But yet for us that believe, it's a beautiful thing to fall into His hands. And we are in His hands. Day by day. The Father's hand, the Son's hand.

No man can pluck us out of His hand. And friends, but think of that. The verse that says, Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. There's something very serious about the Word of God and of salvation true.

And woe to me if you do not hear the Gospel preached clearly enough from my lips. There's a holy terror that should move us, that should move me, that should move us corporately.

And we want to strive, to aspire to be, to hear, to respond, to do that which God prompts us to. And that obligation that we have to do His work.

[3:22] And we read in this one that we've just read, Luke 13, Strive, strive, it says, to enter into that straight gate, that narrow gate. And the word strive here, I'm told, has the sense of to struggle to accomplish something.

There's a struggle here. There's a struggling as in an agony, is the literal sense of it, the word that underlies our word strive here. There's a determination.

There's a willingness to suffer, to accomplish something. Do we have that as Christians today? I think for some, it's like, it's an armchair kind of Christianity. It's almost like, we're like that typical Aussie norm, you know, sitting there with his bare belly and flicking the channels, as if it's an armchair kind of Christianity.

Some people like that, don't they? They trust Christ or they make a profession of faith, but then there's nothing more that seems to happen. And you wonder whether it's real. Whether it's real. Whether it's a false conversion, as we know can be the case. People can think they're saved when they're not. And how much more ought we to wrestle?

[4:32] Not that it's a striving of our own saving of ourselves, but that we take it very seriously, the message of salvation. That we want to strive to enter into that narrow gate. To be found in Christ.

To pray through. To realise what it means to trust him. To realise what Calvary means. The depth of it. The length of it. The height of it. The breadth of it.

The love of God. To take it seriously. Salvation truth. And we know some Christians, they fast. They wrestle in prayer. They take the word of God seriously.

They tremble at his word. That's how we ought to be, brothers and sisters, to strive to enter into the narrow gate. And Acts 14.22.

Paul writes of that seriousness of the faith. Again, Acts 14. Verse 22. It says that as he preached, they were confirming the souls of the disciples.

[5:29] They were grounding them in the truth. And they were exhorting them to continue in the faith. And that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God. This wasn't some kind of easy, breezy, kind of carefree kind of Christianity.

That you get a warm, fuzzy feeling and that's it. You know, there's a sense where there's tribulation that will face you as a believer. And I know there's many exhorted of late of how the Christian life is, it says that anyone who lives godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

And friends, it's a reality in many lands. And I think we can expect more so as time goes by, as the end days approach, that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

You know, there's a seriousness about that, isn't there? Think of that. Much tribulation with, I don't know about you, but I've had very little tribulation apart from the odd kind of snide remark or some body mock to a light degree, but nothing like many of our brothers and sisters do in other lands.

And think of the seriousness of your faith in Christ. Is it something that moves you? Is it something you want to strive to enter into, that narrow gate? Is it something that you're willing to go through much tribulation?

[6:49] As there's a spiritual contest, there's a battle on for your soul and for your eternal destiny. And then to trust in that grace, to be ransomed by it, to be saved by his mercies.

And then think of the Christian life that we're living. Are we taking it seriously enough that it shows in the day by day? It shows down at the workplace. It shows down in the everyday life that we live. It's not just a Sunday Christianity. Some people settle for that. They just, I don't think they have the striving to enter in at the narrow gate. It's just not there.

You don't see it there. And an old-time preacher, Billy Sunday, said this, too much of the preaching of today is too nice, too pretty, too dainty.

It does not kill. It does not kill. And there's a lot of flesh in me, in us. And when we take the Word of God seriously, when we want to strive to enter into the narrow gate, we start to look in the mirror of his Word and we see what we really like.

[8:02] You know, sometimes I look in the mirror and I don't know about you, but sometimes I look in the mirror and I don't like what I see. And the Word of God's like a mirror, isn't it? It's like a mirror that shows us what we are.

It shows all the warts and wrinkles and all the faults. It shows us for what we are, we're sinful and need his grace. And we need to tremble at his Word and see it tells us who we are.

We're sinful and sinners. And our only hope is nothing of our own, nothing of our own working. It's everything of him, everything of him. Christ is all.

Christ is all. And preaching must kill. It must offend. It must offend. If it doesn't offend, then you just as well go home and watch telly.

You know, really. If it's not killing, I need to be killed, as it were, to die to self, to die daily. We must. We must be challenged. The preaching, the Word, the fellowshiping, it must challenge us.

[9:08] That we must be challenged and stirred to strive to enter in at the narrow gate. There's another reference to striving in 2 Timothy 2 verse 5.

It's got the context of the games of the day, of the, like to the Olympic Games, as we would think of today, of the Corinthian Games, of the contests of the time, of the competitions of the day.

And Paul writes to Timothy, in the second letter to Timothy, chapter 2 verse 5, And the context there is of enduring hardness as a good soldier.

You know, a soldier's got to strive. You know, basic training. I know, Saturday there was a man here. He'd been in Iraq for five months. You know, I dread to think of the things he'd have seen over there.

You know, we're on the front line. We should be. As Christians, we should endure hardness as a soldier. And want to please him, who hath chosen us to be a soldier.

[10:15] And it says there, in 2 Timothy 2 verse 5, If a man also strived for masteries, yet he is not crowned, except he strived lawfully. It's got the context of someone striving down there in the stadium, in the competition, in the contest of the games of the day.

There's a striving for the mastery. And Paul says to Timothy, that's like your Christian life. You should be striving for the mastery. Strive to excel.

Strive to do better. Strive to be stronger. Strive to be more committed to him. And he writes likewise in 1 Corinthians 9.25, again, a striving for the mastery.

He says, Every man that strived for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we are incorruptible. So they do it to obtain a crown that's going to be corrupting, and it's going to perish, and become dust.

But we are striving for a crown that is incorruptible. It can never corrupt. It can never decay. It can never waste away and turn to dust. It's everlasting, this crown.

[11:26] And we should strive for the mastery. I know I was sitting next to a chap last night in the wedding reception, and he was saying he had to be very careful because he's on a special diet, and he said he'd lost 33 kilos in just a matter of weeks, and how the kilos had dropped off him.

He had to be temperate in what he was eating. He had to be discerning in what food he would partake of, and he had to refuse those dainty sweet things that we all love to eat, and he had to be temperate.

And think of it as a Christian. We need to be temperate in all things. We need to strive for the mastery. Strive for it, brother. Strive for it, sister. It's like an Olympic athlete would, as we know they do with their strict diets and their exercise regimes, to be the best that they can be.

How much more for you? How much more for me to be the best that we can be for him? How much more that we should strive for the mastery, that we should strive to be a Christian who is willing to go beyond what's comfortable.

And yet there's a battle. There's a striving within us. As we read of Romans 7, where Paul writes of the sin that dwelleth in me. He says, Romans 7, from 17, he says, of that sin that dwelleth in me.

[12:56] He says, verse 18, for I know that in me, in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. Now some people think, I've got something to get credit about or praise about.

I've got something that others should look up to me or whatever it be. But Paul says, there's nothing good in me. For to will, the desire, the wanting to, is present with me.

But how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would, I do not. He says, but the evil which I would not, the evil that I don't want to do, that I do.

What a conflict within, the struggle in Paul. He goes on, verse 20, now if I do that, I would not. It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Sin that dwelleth in me. This is the man of God, the writer of, is it a third of the New Testament? A man that God magnificently used for his glory and gloriously saved and transformed.

[14:04] He says, sin dwelleth in me. There's no good thing within me, dwelling within me. He says, I find a law then that when I would do good, evil is present with me.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. I love the law, the word of God, but I see another law in my members, in my body, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am, wretched, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this dead? And then he writes of the victory that Christ gives.

Christ is the victor. Christ is the liberator. Christ is the redeemer. The one who liberates us from the bondage, the captivity of sin. And so friends, strive for the mastery.

Be like Paul. That you take it seriously. You realise that within is your greatest enemy. It's not someone who's picking on you. It's the within. It's that inclination, that sinful inclination that is residing within your members, within your person, that you have that greatest battle with.

[15:15] But yet you can have victory. It's not a hopeless battle. It's one you're assured victory because victory is in Christ. Friends, strive for the mastery. Another verse that talks about the striving that goes on in life, in walk of faith, is in Hebrews 12 verse 4.

Hebrews 12 verse 4. Paul, if he is the writer of Hebrews, said this in Hebrews 12 verse 4. You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Again, there's that striving, that struggle against is the sense of it. And it's got the sense of a struggling to the point of injury. This is a struggle that is serious, that's full on.

It's not holding back. It's no holds barred. This is a struggle, a resisting, a striving against sin. And the writer of Hebrews says, you have not yet resisted unto blood.

I know there's some budding athletes here, they work themselves hard and they shed blood. They go to their nth degree in their sport, their competition.

[16:21] But how much more ought we to strive to struggle against sin, to take it seriously and to ask the Lord to give us His help and grace to overcome and to not embrace it but to expose it.

The carnal mind is enmity against God. In your unsafe state, there's no hope for you. You're a hopelessly imprisoned soul without Christ's saving grace.

You're hopelessly lost. There's no hope for you. Even if you try to be good, there's no point to it because you cannot attain heaven by any doing of your own.

It's entirely of His own doing. In His dying on the cross where His very body bore your sin. Think of the shame of it. You know, more than the shame of the scarring, of the bruising, of the whipping, of the nailing, of the spitting, was your sin was there.

In all of its ugliness, in the stark reality of it, it was there. It was there on Calvary's hill. That should move us to want to strive against sin, to ask Him to help overcome.

[17:32] And Spurgeon wrote the great preacher of old, said this about the great warfare. He was talking in the context of the warfare between the children of Israel and the Amalek people, the followers of Amalek.

And Amalek in the Bible, it speaks in type, in picture form for us, of the battle that is raging within, of the battle against the flesh, of the old nature.

And Spurgeon said this, First of all, note that this crusade, this sacred holy war, of which I speak, is not with men, but with Satan and with error.

We wrestle not with flesh and blood. You know, sometimes we can think that it's about false teachers and it's about error and false concerns, but it's much more than that.

It's not about the people. They're sadly deceived and need prayer, but it's the enemy who's moving them. It's the enemy who's moving false religions and false movements of our day and false philosophies and teachings.

[18:41] It's the enemy that is at work. And Spurgeon carries on, Christian men are not at war with any man that walks with the earth. We are at war with infidelity. In other words, unfaithfulness to the word of God.

We are at war. The persons of infidels we love and pray for. We are at warfare with any heresy, but we have no enmity, no hatred against the heretics.

We are opposed to and cry war to the knife with everything that opposes God and is true. But towards every man, we would still endeavor to carry out the holy maxim, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.

You know, we happen to live near the Mormon church and I drive past there, I drove past there today, their car park was chock-a-block packed and I thought, how sad, how sad, how very, very sad for those dear people that know not the Saviour.

Friends, it moves me to be grieved for them because I know there's many lovely people there, I'm sure, and we love them, but we know that they do not have Christ as the living Saviour in their souls.

[19:52] And friends, it moves us to be concerned for them and to pray for them, to try to reach them in love that they might be won. And Spurgeon goes on, the Christian soldier hath no gun, no sword, for he fights it not with men.

It is with spiritual wickedness in high places that he fights and with other principalities and powers than with those that sit on thrones and hold scepters in their hands. He says, Christ's war is not a war of flesh and blood, but a war with wrong and spiritual wickedness.

We wrestle against sin. We wrestle against spiritual wickedness in high places. Another old preacher, an old Puritan, said this. He said, our reproofs of sin must come from a warm heart. Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city given to idolatry. Jeremiah tells us that the word of God was as a fire in his bones. It broke out of his mouth like a flame out of a furnace. The word is a hammer, but it breaks not the stony heart when lightly laid on. The word of God has got to hit hard. It's got to hit hard. A hammer's got to hit hard for it to work.

[21:00] And King James said of a minister in his time that he preached as if death were at his back. Ministers should set forth judgment as if it were at the sinner's back to take hold of him.

I fear that the son here not saved today. The son here, you're church-going people, but you're not saved. You're in great peril. You're in great danger.

Wake up and realise your great lack, your great need of him. Friends today, don't kid yourself. Death, the Bible says, is but a step between me and death.

We should be very serious and striving to be found in him, to be striving to enter in at the narrow gate, to be striving to get the mastery, to be striving against sin.

And as believers, we can strive together, it says, in Philippians 1, 27, it talks of striving together as a group, striving together for the faith. And then in Romans 15, verse 30, Paul says, now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

[22:12] Strive together, strive together, be a part of a gospel-preaching church where you can strive together, strive together in prayer, strive together for the gospel, strive together for the truth, strive together to be evangelising, strive together, to be fellowshiping, to be loving the truth, to be heeding it, to be living it, striving together, encouraging one another as we see the day approaching, exhort one another daily, take it seriously that you want to be where there's others with a like mind, with a like love, with a like-mindedness for the truth, for the gospel, for the saviour, and strive in his power.

Colossians 1, 29, it says, Paul says, Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. Paul wasn't one to do it by halves, was he?

He says there, I was striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. He took it seriously. He was willing to strive to be found in him, to be striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Do we want the power of God to be at work in our lives? Do we hunger and thirst for it? You know, the old-time church, they tarried and prayed till the power came. We need to strive, to take it seriously, to strive in God's power and to rely upon his empowerment and for God to be heard and obeyed, to occupy till he come, occupy till he come.

As a word in the Gospels, Christ says to the church, Occupy till I come. And that word occupy, it doesn't mean sit back in the easy chair and enjoy the ride in the glory train and just sit back in inactivity and doing virtually nothing for him.

[23:59] The word occupy, it's got the sense of action, of activity, of being active, of being up and doing. Until the nets are full, keep on fishing.

There's a work to be done, there's still souls to win, there's still labour to be undertaking. Is it his power that's working in us? We can all do it in our own strength, I can, we all can do things in our own strength, but be striving according to his working, his empowering, his energising, which worketh in you mightily.

And now unto him that is able to do, exceeding abundantly above, all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Is it working in you? Is his power at work in you? The power of his word, the power of his spirit. An old time preacher said this, Christ is our life. Severed from him we are withered branches.

[25:04] It is only when Christ is clearly seen and embraced that our peace is like a river and our righteousness as the waves of the sea. The entire Christian race is run by pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

All the acts of faith are the fruit of the spirit. The object of all of them is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The warrant of them all is the promise of God, the offer of the gospel.

And while they utterly renounce self, they bring Christ unto the soul, the hope of glory. He goes on, hold fast your profession, stick to him, stand up for him, live unto him, look to him, be ready to die for him, let your desires centre in him, let your motives to holy living be drawn from him, let your sorrows be sanctified by him, let your joys be heightened, chastened, sweetened by him, keep to him alone, none else can do us good.

Friends, it's Christ is our life. Christ is our life. To close, wherefore, my beloved, it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Think of that striving now, to quickly recap, to wrestle, to strive, to struggle, to be in earnest, and yet to rest.

[26:38] It's a conflict there, isn't it? There's a striving that you want to be seriously found in Christ. You're not just flippantly, carelessly, saying some kind of mantra, some kind of repeating a prayer, without Christ not really being evident, with Christ not really being the one that you're claiming, with a conversion in words only, but that Christ is in you.

Is he in you? If he's not in you, you're in dire trouble. You're in serious danger. Strive to be found in him. Strive to enter in at the narrow gate.

Strive to be saved. Not by working to deserve it, but by striving to hear his voice, by striving to obey his call, by striving to yield to his spirit, by striving to bend your knee unto him as Lord, as Master, as Saviour, by striving to respond to his plea, to his invitation.

Strive to be found in him. Strive to enter in at that straight gate, that narrow gate. Strive for the Mastery as his disciple. Strive for the Mastery as an athlete would.

Strive for the Mastery as a man of God, as a woman of God, who takes the Word of God seriously enough to obey it. Strive for the Mastery. Strive against sin.

[27:58] Let it be crucified. Let it die daily. Make a deliberate, conscious decision to kill it. To strive against it.

Strive together. Be found in the fellowship. Be encouraging one another. You are here to bless others as well as to be blessed. Don't come to church selfishly or just to sit back and not be engaged.

But strive together in the faith. Strive together. Exhort one another. Talk to people. Encourage one another as we see the day approaching. Strive together for the faith.

And strive in God's power that is He that's working in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. To labour, striving according to His working. That all of your efforts are not of your own volition even.

That it's not whether you feel like doing it or not. But you're striving according to His working which worketh in you mightily. Whatever God is urging you to do, obey Him.

[28:59] Obey Him today. Don't put it off. I strive to please Him. And then you can know that wonderful rest. The wonderful rest that nothing of anything that I can do warrants heaven for me.

It's just my privilege to serve. It's just my privilege to labour. It's just my privilege to love Him. It's my privilege to be His. and to be His follower today.

It's your privilege to be His child. To belong to Him. And to receive the salvation gift. And you can have a wonderful rest. But it's nothing of me.
It's everything of Him. Christ is all. Christ is all. I love to tell the story of haunting things above.