

Strive To Enter

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Luke's Gospel, chapter 13, and reading again at verse 24. We'll read from verse 23.

And someone said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few? And he said to them, Strive to enter through the narrow door. And his words, Strive to enter through the narrow door.

As you and I know, questions are often the way that we learn as we go through life. It's one of the things children are always known for doing, for asking questions. But our time of questions don't stop.

As children, we continue to ask questions all the way through life. And sometimes the answers that we get to questions have a profound impact on our lives. Sometimes they're life-changing.

And we find that Jesus was often being asked questions. And the response was often, when Jesus was asked questions, that people were amazed at the answers that he gave.

[1 : 12] Because he spoke with great authority. And, in fact, nobody could argue at the end with what he said. And here is Jesus, and he's making his way up to Jerusalem.

And, of course, Jesus' heart would be heavy with what lay ahead of him. Because he knew that he was going to eventually die. As a substitute for sinners, what we are celebrating today.

But as he went through all the towns and all the villages, he preached everywhere he went. Because he had a long route. He had a long preaching ministry going in and out of all the little towns, all the little villages.

Everywhere he went, he spoke and crowds followed him. And we find here that, as he's going through Jesus, he never missed an opportunity of presenting the gospel.

And of challenging people with regard to the gospel. And it's still the same to this very night that the gospel of Jesus Christ ought to challenge us.

[2 : 22] Because as we come under the word of God, we should always be challenged in our own lives as to where we are in relation to it. Where do we stand in relation to what God's word is saying to us?

Where do we find ourselves in relation to these things? Because we don't just come to the word and look at it in an academic way. Or just to look at it and glance over it.

It should be such that we try and figure out, right, this is what God's word is saying. But where am I in relation to what is being said? Jesus always did that.

Jesus always challenged people. And he still does the same with us tonight as well. And so we ought to be challenged by what the word of God says.

And so as Jesus is making his way, someone in the crowd asked this question. And the question, in some ways, was very straightforward. Lord, will those who are saved be few?

[3 : 24] Now, I have no idea why this man asked this particular question. Well, I don't even know if it was a man. Someone asked the question.

And in all probability, well, it may be that the person, it might have been some question that just came to his mind there and then. Or it might have been a question that had been weighing with him for a long, long time.

So we're not told whether it was a question that he just thought up at the time or whether it was something that had been with him for a long, long time. In all probability, this person who would have been a Jew held on to the really strong idea that the Jews had.

And that they were the people of privilege, that they were the select out of this world that would be sharing in the kingdom of God.

And the Jews had a sense of this identity, the sense of belonging, the sense of God favoring them. And they had this idea, many of them did, that those who would be saved would indeed be very few, just the Jews.

[4 : 37] And that everybody else would be excluded. So maybe this man was simply wanting Jesus to reinforce what he himself believed. The privilege that the Jew had, and we've got to remember that they had a great privilege, because they were the nation starting off with Abraham.

Remember how God had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. And he said to Abraham, I am going to make a great nation of you. And he said that it is through you all the nations of this world will be blessed.

And of course, that was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the coming of Christ, who came through that line all the way through, from a human point of view, Jesus was born as a Jew into this world, but still of course as the Son of God.

But it was from there then that the gospel spread out into all the nations of this world. So that promise that was given to Abraham and was worked on right the way through, and then the great explosion of the gospel from the time of Jesus onwards all throughout this world.

But what should have been the most wonderful privilege, and was on occasions for the Jew a great privilege, often turned out for them to be anything but a privilege.

[5 : 52] Because they were resting on this as a privilege without doing anything about it. And it's the same thing, it can be true for ourselves as well. That you see, privilege carries with it responsibility.

Privilege does not guarantee salvation. You see, the Jew thought that because they were born Jews, that that would guarantee them entry into the kingdom of God.

And that's why Nicodemus, who was a religious leader amongst the Jews, he was absolutely thrown when Jesus said to him, in order to get into the kingdom you must be born again.

Nicodemus was scratching his head, this was something new to him. But this, you see, is what Jesus came to show, the importance of a personal relationship with himself.

And that is why it is true that we can be brought up in a Christian community. That is a great privilege. Because many people don't have that.

[6 : 58] But unless we use that privilege rightly, then it isn't a privilege at all. In fact, it works to the very reverse. We can be brought up in a Christian home, which again is an awesome privilege.

But if we don't use that privilege, if we despise it or neglect it, then it isn't a privilege. In fact, it becomes a curse to us if we dismiss it.

Again, coming to God's house, that's a great thing to do. There isn't anything better that you could do tonight than come to worship God. Because God, you've got to remember that Jesus has promised to presence himself here.

And it's a great blessing. It's a great privilege. But unless we make use of the privilege, then coming to God's house in and of itself does not guarantee us automatic entry into the kingdom of God.

We can be in the presence of the Lord. We can be where his word has been preached. And yet still remain strangers, still keeping Jesus away. So the Lord was often speaking to the Jews about the importance of not resting in what they were resting in, but that there was nowhere they could rest in, but in and through himself.

[8 : 20] And so we find that this man, as we said, this person asks us this question. And probably this person was maybe just wanting to, as we said, reinforce what he himself believed.

But Jesus tells this person that there will be those who will come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south, and they will enter the kingdom. And that, indeed, we're told that, that beautiful picture that we have in the book of Revelation about the saved, that they come from all different races, from all different tribes, from all different nations, that they come from all over the world.

Maybe we're very unkind to this man, and maybe the question that he asked was very genuine. It could be because he was seeing so many people turning away from Jesus.

Because initially, when Jesus began his ministry, huge crowds followed him. You have that instance in John chapter 6, where there were vast crowds, and in fact they were so enthusiastic about Jesus, they wanted to go and make him king.

But by the end of the chapter, huge crowds began to desert him. Because they didn't like his teaching. They found it offensive.

[9 : 45] It took away their own, what they thought was their own goodness. And Jesus stripped away everything from them and showed them that the only way that they could be right with God was in and through himself, by eating upon himself, upon taking him as the bread of life.

And they were offended, and they turned away. to the point where Jesus said to his own disciples, will you also go away?

I often think that's one of the, I think it's probably one of the most heartbreaking moments. It must have been in the life of Jesus, where he's seeing vast crowds turning away from him, and going away.

But that, sadly, is just how it is. So, anyway, here's this man, or this person, and he's asked this question.

And it's a very speculative question. And one of the things, Jesus isn't interested in speculation. You know, you can spend all your life asking speculative questions. But Jesus is concerned that we deal with realities, and we deal with the truth.

[10 : 55] And so, Jesus, straight away, he kind of turns things around here. And he just says, very simply to this man, strive, or this person, strive to enter through the narrow door.

Now, with regard to salvation, you and I, we know that we believe in the sovereignty of God with regard to salvation.

God planned salvation. It's God's plan. The initiative all lies with God. Wasn't our idea.

We didn't think it. We didn't work it out. It's God's purpose. It's God's plan. God planned it all, purpose it all, and then in his mercy, not only provided the way, but he's told us how to get the salvation.

It's all of God. And we're reminded of that, say, like in Ephesians, which tells us, by grace you are saved through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

[12 : 02] We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. So, you see, it's all of God. And can you imagine the boasting there would be if we had a part to play within the salvation.

Churches would be boasting and they'd be saying, oh, look at all the people that we have converted. Or you could hear ministers saying, oh, look at all the people I've converted.

Well, no minister has ever converted anybody. It's the Lord who saves. Yes, the Lord uses. Jesus. The Lord uses people.

He uses ministers. He uses people as just as instruments. We're just instruments, as it were, in his hand to share the word, speak the word.

But it's the Lord who actually saves. We don't save ourselves. Can you imagine the boasting if we could save ourselves?

[13 : 05] You'd be saying, do you know what I did? Do you know what I did? And somebody else would, oh, that's nothing. Listen to what I did. But you see, we take no glory in it. But having said that, we also know that there is nowhere from Genesis right the way through to Revelation that tells us that although the initiative lies with God, the purposes and plans are all of God, that all we do is nothing and we just sit back and we allow, we just sort of take it easy and we just think, oh, well, we'll see what will happen.

That's not what the Bible says. The Bible puts all the responsibility upon ourselves to seek, to search, to strive, to ask, to plead.

Over and over and over again, we find that the gospel is always presented in the way that we are to seek and to search.

And it is through the seeking and the searching that we will find. Because salvation, remember, is that gift. We seek that gift. God gives that gift.

We don't make the gift, we don't work the gift up in ourselves. We receive it. We get it from Him. He saves us, but we seek for it.

[14 : 30] Our duty is the seeking. And so that's what Jesus is saying here, that we are to strive, strive, He says, to enter through the narrow door.

Now, of course, a door always brings you in from one place into another, from one area into another. If you come to the door of a house, you come from outside, inside.

If you go through doors within the house, you go from one room to another. And it's the same with regard to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That we enter through this door.

And, of course, we know that this door is Jesus Christ. Because He says, I am the door. Strive to enter. Jesus could have said that. Strive to enter through the narrow door.

And I am that door. Strive to enter. The door. And you know, when we go through that door, life changes. Because we're brought, as we say, when you go through a door, you go from one room into another.

[15 : 33] From one place into another. One area into another. And that's what happens when we're saved. We come into a new world. A world of forgiveness.

A world of peace. A world where things begin to make sense. A world where we feel we belong.

A world where we feel we belong to God. It's an amazing world. This great sense of being accepted by God, which wasn't there before.

God. Now you see, you and I know that sin is a great barrier. It's a great barrier between ourselves and God. And sin is something we can't get under it.

We can't get over it. We can't push it aside. We can't ignore it. It's there. It's a barrier between ourselves and God. But that's what God is doing. He is taking away that barrier in and through Jesus Christ so that we can have acceptance with him.

[16 : 41] So Jesus is saying, I am the door. By me, if any one enter in, he shall be saved. And of course, God's love and grace is just, it's so amazing.

That's why we sing amazing grace. Just it is. It's this amazing grace. And part of the wonder of it is that God, by his grace, removes the wrath that is due for sin.

And so we enter through this door, as we said, into this new world of acceptance, this world of pardon, this world of peace. And again, excuse me, the great idea of being made right with God.

Now, we're told that it's a narrow door. So, why is that? Well, one or two things we have to say that it's not narrow. First of all, this door is not narrow with regard to the invitation that is given.

Because this invitation to come in this door, this invitation is given far and wide. This invitation is spread right throughout this whole world.

[17 : 54] And anybody who will listen will hear it. because this invitation is given into all the nations of this world. This invitation is, whoever comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.

Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. You couldn't have a wider invitation than that. Far-reaching. So, we can't say that the invitation is narrow in any way or shape or form.

Neither is the invitation narrow with regard to God's love. Because God's love is so great that he gave, he gave the most that he could give. God couldn't have given any more than he gave in order to save us.

He gave us only begotten son. He couldn't do more. God. It's the greatest display of love this world has ever seen or known. So, there's nothing narrow about the extent of God's love in saving.

So, how is it narrow? Well, it's so narrow that it seems that few seem to enter. Now, we know that at the end of the day, there's a number that no man can number.

[19 : 14] It tells us that in Revelation. But it would also seem to indicate that although there's going to be this great number that are eventually brought into the kingdom, there's still going to be a vast number that don't.

Jesus and Matthew, he talks about two ways, a broad way and a narrow way. And talking of the broad way, he said many are on that broad road that leads to destruction.

Whereas, talking of the narrow way, he said there are few that there are who find it. Now, that's solemn. That's challenging. And, this door, we have to say, with regard to this narrow door, that this door is so narrow that there are certain things that you can't take through.

For instance, you cannot take your sin through. Now, what I mean by that is that if you're challenged here tonight and you're saying to yourself, you know, I'd like to be a Christian, but see the kind of life I live, the way I live, I'm not prepared to give this up.

Now, when you become a Christian, you don't leave your sin behind at one level. You remain sinners. And that's a grief to us. And it doesn't mean that we live a perfect life the moment we become Christians.

[20 : 41] We still falter. We still fail. We still sin. But what it means here about this narrowness is that we can't say, right, I'm going to be a Christian, but I'm going to live exactly as I lived before.

I'm going to live to myself. Because you see, before you become a Christian, you live to yourself. You worship yourself. You're in control of your life and you don't want God to be in control of your life.

And you see, you cannot live that. You can't live a life where God is in control of your life and you're in control of your life at the same time. You have to give yourself up.

And that's why this door is narrow. Because a lot of people aren't prepared for that. And they say, yeah, I'd like to be a Christian, but I'm not prepared to take up the cross, to deny myself and to follow Him.

I'm not prepared to give up who I am. I'm not prepared to have Jesus as my Lord and my King. I want to go to heaven.

[21 : 47] I want God's peace. But I'm not prepared for that. Well, if you're not prepared for that, then this door is too narrow for you. That's why we're saying here it's a narrow door.

And it's too narrow for those who want a very easy Christian life. Those who say, you know, I want to be a Christian. I want the crown, but I don't want the cross.

But Jesus says the way to the crown is through the cross. You have an example in Pilgrim's Progress of two people. Christian, who left the city of destruction, he was prepared for the cross in order to get the crown.

pliable, who left the city of destruction with Christian, wanted the crown, but he wasn't prepared for the cross. And as soon as the first difficulty came, he turned back.

So it's too narrow for those who want an easy life, who want an easy Christian life. you see, there are some people who, they, they, they, they will, they will, excuse me, and we could say, it's also too narrow for those who, who don't want any of the shame or the ridicule or the offense that comes with being a Christian.

[23 : 09] And you know, that's, that is a real, real barrier. You know, that's part of what makes this door so narrow. Maybe there's somebody here tonight and you're like that. Because you say to yourself, I wouldn't mind being a Christian, but I don't know if I could cope with what people will say.

People are going to talk about me. And people are going to, they're going to speak in the street, they're going to speak in the pub, they're going to talk about me. And I'm, I'm just not ready for that.

And so people will hold back because it's too narrow. Door's too narrow. But you know, perish the thought that you'll be lost. But these people tonight that you're afraid of, these people that are holding you back, you know, if you get lost, you will realize what a fool I was to be afraid because of what they might say.

And so there is, there is this, but that you mustn't allow that to come. Satan will make a field day of that in your thinking. And I'm saying this because I know exactly what that's like.

And I'm sure a lot here tonight can remember the wrestling that you went on, that you went through thinking about these things. Oh, I could never stand up and be a Christian.

[24 : 25] I could never stand up for Christ because you're saying, I can't bear the shame of it. Isn't it extraordinary? The most perfect person ever to come into this world.

The only sinless, beautiful character and we're ashamed to identify with him. It's madness. It just shows the distortion of sin that is within people's hearts.

and again, it's too narrow for those who think that they're good enough for themselves because there's a lot of people who think, you know, I'm all right.

I've lived a decent life. I've never harmed anybody. As far as I can judge looking around at folk, I've been pretty decent. And I think that at the end of the day, I like to believe that God will say, well, you lived a pretty decent life.

It'll be all right for you. But that's not the way it works. And if you think like that, then this door is too narrow for you because it is only, the only way we can have right, being made right with God is in and through Jesus Christ.

[25 : 33] There is no other way. This is God's provision. And any other way, we're trying to make ourselves wiser than God. So we see the exhortation that is given.

We're told that we have to strive. The word means to agonize. It means intensity. And that's what we've got to do. This is all or nothing. We don't dip in and dip out.

This is hard. This is where you have to give your all into it. You see, not only is this door narrow, but there are many enemies around.

Satan doesn't want to give you up. He's got a controlling influence on you that you don't understand. We're told in Ephesians that when we're outside Christ, that the prince of the power of this air exercises an influence on us.

Even when we become Christians, he's still at us, still drawing us aside. The world is not ready to give you up. In fact, the world is never ready to give you up.

[26 : 37] So you have these forces. there's all that's going on within yourself and there's enemies out with, and they don't want you to go through this door. And that's why Jesus says you've got to strive.

Because you know you can come into church, you can be influenced by what's being said and you say, I need to get sorted with the Lord. But then there's these voices, all these other voices saying, oh, take your time.

You don't need to sort that just now. Deal with that later on. See, that's where you're not striving. You're just, you're giving in. So how do we strive?

Well, we obviously, we strive in prayer by seeking the Lord. We're saying to the Lord, Lord, you have to help me here. And please be honest with the Lord.

Because tonight, supposing you're here and you say, I need to be saved, but actually I don't really want to be saved just now. You know the best thing you can do is go and tell the Lord just that. Be honest with him.

[27 : 38] He knows already. And say to him, Lord, I need your salvation, but I have a problem. I do want to become a Christian, but I'm not ready for it just now.

Please, give me the desire, give me the heart, so that I will really see and come into my life. Lord, take over. You know, if we pray like that, he will.

If we're striving, we must be in the word of God. This is where God has revealed himself. He has shown us a way of salvation. All the signposts are here in the word.

Again, we must come to God's house. This is where Jesus has promised his presence to be. So we must come where he has promised to be. And the reason we must strive is because not everybody seeking will enter.

Now, these are solemn words. You see, some people will be looking to enter, but they're lethargic, they're careless about it.

[28 : 43] Many people, they come to church and they say, oh yeah, I hope to get all this sorted one day. But that's not good enough. And there are those who say, oh, I'm going to seek God, but they go their own way, and they try and work it out themselves.

But it also tells us here that there are those who will come, and they will say, they will come when once, for many I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able when once the master of the door has risen and shut the door.

So that shows us there's going to come a time, a cut off time. And this would indicate that at the moment the master of the house, that our Lord, it's like he's seated, and the invitation is still there.

The invitation is there to you tonight. But there's going to come a time when he's going to rise up and close the door. We have a lot of instances of the doors being closed, like at the flood.

It was the Lord who shut Noah in. The Lord closed that door. Nobody could then get in or out once that was closed, and then the gate, the waters of the deep broke.

[29 : 52] The Lord is going to close the door. And there's going to come a time then when it's too late, and people are going to say, Lord, open to us. And you know the Lord's going to say, well, you wouldn't open to me.

I knocked on your heart through my providence. Remember the things that came into your life. That was me. I was trying to get your attention. I spoke to you through the word.

I was at your heart. But you wouldn't open to me. Now I am not going to open to you. That's a solemn, solemn thought.

Because when time goes, that's it. Our time is over. And Jesus is showing us here that they will say to us, Lord, we ate and drank in your presence.

And this, I believe, is a picture of people who are using the means of grace. They come to church, they use all the things that are there. But while they drank, ate and drank in his presence, they didn't eat and drink with him.

[30 : 56] That's what God's people did today. They ate and drank with Jesus. They were in fellowship and communion with him. That's a big difference. And the Lord says, I don't know you.

I don't know you. And he's going to say, depart from me, you workers of evil. And in the place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's one of the most awful pictures because at that particular time, I believe that those who are outside the kingdom, they will rage when they see those entering in and where they're banished from the presence of the Lord.

And they're going to come from the east and the west and from the north and the south. And some who are last will be first and some who are first will be last. And I believe the Lord is really speaking here about the Jew and the Gentile.

There was the Jew at first. all the privileges, all the opportunities. The Gentiles were outside. But they were going to respond to the gospel. They were going to come in. The Jews were rejecting, well not all of them, but by and large at that particular time, rejecting Jesus.

Please, you make sure. Don't waste your time on speculating about this and that. Listen to these words that Jesus, who knows how it is, says, strive to enter in.

[32 : 19] Remember we said there are lots of forces against you entering in. Please make it the goal of your life that you will enter in.

Ask the Lord tonight to help you. And if you're really serious about it, he will. Lord, please take me in with your share. Let us pray. Lord, we pray that you will bless us tonight with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

Jesus, we pray that if there are any here who are struggling with regard to salvation, that you will make it clear to them, that you will open the way, that the path will become clear, and that they will see you as a great giver of the most wonderful gift in this world, and that we'll be able to close in with you, believing and trusting you.

Lord, be near to us. Help us in our need. Help us, Lord, as we deal with all our own private and personal issues in life. Grant us your grace in these things.

Watch over us. Bless the fellowship that will take place in the hall, and we pray that we will know your peace and help and strength and grace, and that you will be with us, and that we will know truly that fellowship in yourself and do with one another.

[33 : 35] Take away your sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in Psalm number two from Sing Psalm. Psalm number two, sing psalms.

And we're going to sing from verse seven to the end. Psalm two from verse seven to the end. The king then solemnly declares, I will proclaim the Lord's decree.

Today your father I become, you are my son, he said to me. Ask me and for your heritage, I'll give you nations near and far. You'll break them with an iron rod and smash them like a potter's jar.

And the last verse, pay homage to the royal son, lest you in wrath aside her thrust. For swiftly can his anger blaze. Blessed are all who in him trust.

Four verses, Psalm two from seven to the end. The king then solemnly declares, I will proclaim the Lord's decree.

[34 : 57] Today your father I've become. You are my son, he said to me. Ask me and for your heritage, I'll give you nations near and far.

You'll break them with an iron rod and smash them like a potter's jar.

Now therefore kings through wisdom find, you judges of the earth give ear. With reverence come and serve the Lord.

Bow down with joy and trembling fear. Pay homage to the royal son. Blessed you in wrath aside a thrust.

For swiftly can his anger blaze. Blessed are all who in him trust.

[36 : 11] Now with the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.