

Introduction

Picture this... it's a dark rainy night. The chill of the early spring has not yet lifted. The kids are sleeping, you and your spouse are in the living room quietly reading. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. The knock is urgent and consistent. As you approach the door you look at the time and wonder who could be coming to the door at 10:00PM. You open the door and it is a well dressed man who greets you with a smile. He states that he has arrived, thanks you for opening the door, and asks to come inside.

If you are like me... you may be tempted to welcome him into your house, but I might also say "I don't know you and I don't know where you come from". There are very few of us that would bring him inside and welcome him without a second thought or further questioning. You do not know this man. You have never seen him before. You have no relationship with him. You do not know where he comes from. Now replace that man with a beloved family member who arrives surprisingly at your house. You open the door and probably instantly embrace and welcome them inside.

The point of this scenario is that there are times when the interaction is based on the relationship that exists between the two parties. In our text today we will look at a fascinating sermonette given by Jesus which points us to a very real moment in time. There is a time for each of us when entrance will be given or denied based on whether or not we are known by the one who is keeping the door.

Let us read our text today and reflect on the words of Jesus our Lord as recorded by Luke.

[Display Text Luke 13:22-30](#)

Warning to Religious and Cultural Elite

As we see in the opening verses, Jesus is traveling through the countryside teaching and preaching. He is speaking largely to Jews of varying levels of commitment to their religion, but all with a strong pride in who they were as a people, as a religious, people, and to some extent, God's chosen people.

Jesus is interacting with people who often assumed their status before God to be based on what they DO for God. Their faith was largely tied up in their own sense of righteousness, good works, and religious performance or adherence to a moral, religious, and ethical code.

This is not so different than how many of us see ourselves. Sometimes we allow our own self righteousness cause us to **equate morality with outcome**. If I do right then good things will happen to me. If I do wrong then bad things will happen to me. Once those thoughts take hold we then **equate outcome with God's favor or disfavor**. If bad things happen then God is punishing me. If good things happen it is because God is rewarding me.

Because of our commitment as a people to truth, doctrine, righteousness, and the pursuit of holiness, we are often very much in tune with what is right, what is good, what the bible says. We can then see ourselves as "good" and view those around us as not as "good" or "right". This can lead to the same assumption of our standing before God that the Jewish people had who Jesus was speaking to.

Jody has mentioned this idea several times as we have worked through Luke. There is a sneaky lie that often creeps into the church that tells us **our status and relationship with God is based on what we DO FOR God.**

There is another aspect of the passage we must wrestle with. As a reformed Christian church, our soteriology or our theology of salvation strongly emphasis God's work in salvation before and above any work of our own. Yet in this passage which we see Jesus give a strong command to "Strive to enter" through the narrow door. There are obvious questions of work and salvation that arise from Jesus' teaching.

That phrase "Strive to enter through the narrow door" is the phrase we are going to focus on today so as we work through this passage, consider how you are to respond to Jesus' words.

V. 23 Lord will those who are saved be few?

There is very little we are told about the one asking this question. Usually when a Pharisee asked the question, we are given that detail and here we are not told it is a pharisee. Also, the nature of the question is not cynical or combative. I agree with many scholars who suggest this is someone wrestling with Jesus' teaching and trying to understand how this will play out if what he says is true. We should identify with this question as representative of the desire to understand and to grasp the full breadth of what it means to come to salvation and how the gospel plays out and affects the world around us. How does this all actually work? Jesus does not answer the question on a systematic level, but turns the questioner's focus from broad ideas to an introspective warning against an assumption of our own standing with God.

V. 24 Strive to enter the narrow door

Jesus' answer shifts from a broad focus of who and how many will be saved, to answer how we as individuals should interact with our salvation. Jesus says "strive to enter the narrow door". The word "strive" Jesus uses is the word "**Agōnizomai**". This word means

Definition

- to enter a contest: contend in the gymnastic games
- to contend with adversaries, fight
- metaph. to contend, struggle, with difficulties and dangers
- to endeavor with strenuous zeal, strive: to obtain something

Word Usage - Total: 8

competes in the games 1, fight 1, fighting 1, fought 1, laboring earnestly 1, strive 2, striving 1

When it comes to the theology of salvation, this idea of Agōnizomai is not usually how we as reformed evangelical protestants present the gospel. I think an understanding of this word "Agōnizomai" is important to understanding this passage. This word specifically is used 8 times and Paul uses the word 6 of those times. This word is used with an athletic or combative context. Lets look quickly at how this word is used.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

1Co 9:25 Every athlete (NASB – “**who competes in the games**”) exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

Col 1:29 For this I **toil**, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Col 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always **struggling** on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

1Ti 4:10 For to this end we **toil and strive**, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

1Ti 6:12 **Fight** the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

2Ti 4:7 I have **fought** the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

When we say this word, what is the English word that it sounds like? Agony? Consider the agony of an Olympic athlete who directs the totality of his being in dedication, focus, and determination over a long time space of time towards a singular goal of obtaining the gold medal. Spoiler alert! I believe there is a passage that gives us insight into what Jesus is saying here. Perhaps many of you are already thinking of [Hebrews 12:1-1](#). This passage will be a parallel passage for us. Lets read that passage together.

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12 gives us the same idea of running, enduring, striving, but clarifies the second element of Jesus’s admonition to “Strive to enter through the narrow door”. Verse 2 says “Looking unto Jesus. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith”. All of our efforts towards holiness and repentance and faith are founded and finished by Jesus. It is because of HIS work and HIS AGONY that we are even able to work at all. Understanding that Jesus is the narrow door we must strive to enter the kingdom through points to the exclusivity and severity of understanding who Jesus is and what he has done on our behalf, and what it means to “Strive to enter through the narrow door”.

We are going to talk through the passage to gain greater perspective on this phrase, but then return and discuss our response. Let us continue through the text.

V. 24 Many will seek to enter, but will not be able

Jesus again shifts the focus of the conversation. Jesus now gives an explanation of how this truth applies to all of us collectively and individually. One way or another, we are all trying to find salvation from the sin, brokenness, guilt, and general wreck of life. It is good to consider this from a group perspective and an individual perspective. Deep down inside each of us, our religious groups, our communities, our political entities, our collective culture is pushing towards ideas, goals, and objectives that are meant to solve or deal with the problems of sin and brokenness seen at all levels of society. Individually we all wrestle with the guilt and pain of our own sin and brokenness. Our inability to deal with life in a way that brings life and salvation to ourselves or those around us. We have all brought

brokenness into relationships, into our church, and into every area of our life. One way or another, we all recognize we need salvation. As cultural Christians, we recognize that our eternal destiny is at stake and we stand in judgement before a holy God and the guilt and fear of the knowledge that we are sinful people burns in our souls. Jesus tells us to “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able”. Let us look at the next verse.

V. 26-27 Then you will begin to say, We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets. But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’

Now we see Jesus’ addressing why entering the narrow door is not something where his audience should assume that they will be given entry. Jesus knows our hearts just as he knows the hearts of those he was speaking to in the Jewish villages. Remember we said early on this passage was a warning against the religious elite? Jesus tells us that many are going through life assuming right standing before God based on their identification with a religious, or cultural, or moral identity.

Take a sneak peak towards the end of this chapter. Jesus looks over the city of Jerusalem and mourns their rejection of who he is and how he is their only hope of salvation. This was a people that rejected God’s work of salvation on their behalf in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their rejection was largely based on their own self-righteous religious and cultural identity.

Lets look quickly at Matthew 7 which is an expanded presentation of Jesus teaching from Matthews perspective.

Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Jesus is pleading with people who live their lives assuming their right standing before God and assuming their relationship with God is based on their own goodness and what they have done for God. Their work and their religious and cultural identity is irrelevant. They are not known by the one who keeps the door into the kingdom.

Lets look back at Luke 13:28. Those that are not known by Jesus are left in a state of hopelessness, anger, and futility as they have rejected the narrow door in their own self righteous attempts to save themselves. Look further at vs 29.

V. 29 And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. People will come from the East, West, North, South. Some that are first will be last...

As we consider how we and many of those around us often struggle with trusting in our identity as good, moral, righteous, successful people as proof of their good standing before God, we see here Jesus give insight into the makeup of the kingdom of God. We are not the door-keepers of the kingdom. Jesus does not need us to keep track of who does and does not get to enter and in fact, he points out that our systems and hierarchies are not how the kingdom is designed. Many of us will be surprised at who is honored in the kingdom. We will be surprised at those who are given entry in the kingdom because from our perspective, they are not like us. They are not those who we would expect. all They are not “Good” like us.

There is incredible inclusivity in the kingdom as there is incredible exclusivity in the kingdom. Inclusivity and diversity as people from all tribes and tongues and all peoples and cultures will gather around the table to feast and celebrate together as the family of God. This idea is held in balance with incredible exclusivity in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the narrow door through which each of these individuals will enter. Jesus speaks to us as individuals to strive to enter the kingdom through the narrow door, because there are many who will seek to enter, but will not be able.

Back in Matthew we find this theme in the story of the Centurion who came to Jesus in recognition of Jesus' authority and in recognition that he himself had no goodness or ability to save himself or his family. Jesus said that he had found no greater faith in all of Israel. Gods own people the Jews would be surprised to see someone like this gain entry into the kingdom and especially with such honor and commendation from Jesus.

Isn't it interesting the people that seem to receive an easier message from Jesus of salvation and forgiveness of sins? Read through the gospels and look at Jesus' harsh words and strong warnings and consider the audience. Then look at those that seem to effortlessly come to salvation in Jesus. It is not the good, righteous, religious people. It is the poor, the needy, the gentile, and the downtrodden. This is especially seen in the book of Luke. Those that recognize their own need and their own lack of ability to save themselves, and the lordship of Jesus find salvation much easier than those who bring their own righteousness to the table. Where would you fit into this? How much of your own righteousness do you hold on to as your come to Christ?

Our Response to the Narrow Door

So how do we respond to this admonition from our Lord?

Tim Keller often speaks of two perspectives of how Jesus shows us our need for salvation. First Jesus shows us how he saves us from our sin. Then Jesus shows us how he saves us from ourselves, and our own righteousness.

Jesus Alone Saves Us from Our Sin

First let me speak to those who have never considered their own need for salvation. If you are watching or listening and you are not sure if you have ever bowed your knee to Jesus as your lord and savior, then today is the day of salvation. Repent from your sin and turn in faith towards Jesus as your only hope of salvation. Strive to enter the kingdom through the narrow door. There is no salvation in any other. There is no other name by which we are saved. Salvation is found in Jesus alone. Do not spend another day pursuing salvation from any other idea or means. Just as Pilgrim in Pilgrims progress set out on his journey to rid himself of his burden of sin, you must "Strive to enter the narrow door" in your attempts to rid yourself of the burden of Sin. It is in Jesus that you are saved from your sin. Bend your will, kneel before Jesus as your Lord, trust in his work to save you and stop working to find salvation through any other means or method or person.

Jesus Alone Saves Us from Our Own Righteousness

Second, let me speak to those who like me are forced to identify with the religious elite. I love our church. I love our people. We seek and apply truth. We sacrifice for each other and for our God. We

steward what God has given us. We acknowledge and honor God in all areas of our life and live out the great commission as best as we are able. Guys most of the time, I think we get it right! And you know what? That is where most of us trip up. We come to the kingdom of God and think we are able to build a door into the kingdom by getting it right, doing it right, and not being as wrong and sinful as those around us.

It is no surprise to me that in Matthew 7, this teaching of the narrow door is placed so closely to a passage that so many of us skim right over. "Judge not that you be not judged". Why does it feel so right and so good to point out the sin of others and the erroneous theology and ideas that are found in the church all around us? Because it makes us feel better about being right and doing life right. How do you view and treat those less "Righteous". How do you treat those who are less "right"? How do you view those whose theology and doctrine, whose philosophy of church issues, family issues, life issues, is not "right"? Are you the pharisee looking down on these people in self-righteousness and condemnation? Or are you the poor man recognizing your own desperate need for Christ work on your behalf despite your good theology, despite your labor as a parent, as a spouse, as an active member of your church?

You see this is where most of us are. Most of you are generally pretty good Christians by all standards. For us, we must "Strive", *Agōnizomai*, and work daily to let go of our burdens not only of sin, but also our own righteousness and our own attempts at being right before God. Saying you are a sinner does not save you. Being a good theologian does not save you. Being a good Christian parent or spouse or committed loyal church member or dedicated church leader or any other type of "Good" person does not save you. It is your relationship with Jesus that matters. It is whether or not you are known by Jesus.

We desperately want this to work in a way that leaves it up to us. We look around us and find ways we can feel better about how we are morally or religiously or theologically superior from those around us. Just like the Jews Jesus was preaching to, we are in danger of assuming we will be given entry into the kingdom because of our religious or cultural identity. Jesus tells us to strive to enter the kingdom through the narrow door. Jesus is the narrow door. There is no room for your righteousness just as there is not room for your sin. You enter based on the work, life, death, and resurrection and rule of Jesus your savior.

This is the hard work of salvation. Every day we are to wake up and consider Hebrews 12:1-2 Run the race. Setting aside not only the sin, but the weights that beset us. Maybe the hardest weight we all carry is the burden of religious, moral, or general "rightness". We carry the burden of our own righteousness as if it was truly up to us to work our way into the Kingdom. And some of you are tired of carrying this burden. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.

If you are like me, this passage jars you a little bit because the language used is of a different perspective than how I usually talk about salvation and how I come to Christ. But, ultimately as I did a little wrestling or *"Agōnizomai"* of my own, I arrived at a place of incredible joy and peace. You see the beauty of our salvation is that it is not based on how well we work. It is not based on how Good we are. We are saved to a life of struggle and a journey of knowing and experiencing Christ more and more each day. As I consider the race ahead of me, I want to strive, agonize, run, work, and realize the salvation that has been completed on my behalf. Every day letting go of sin and self righteousness and looking more and more to the author and finisher of my faith.

Now look at this guys and we are done. Look ahead to the day where we leave this life and approach that narrow door. The walls of the kingdom of God are finally visible to me and I see the great gates of heaven. I hear the joyful sounds of the banquet table and the marriage supper of the lamb. As I approach the door it is opened and I am embraced and greeted by the great finisher of my faith. My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is he who has promised to complete the work of salvation that he began in my heart so many years ago. That is what it means for me to strive to enter the narrow door. It is not fear, it is no longer guilt or self-righteousness, but pursuit of entering the narrow door. Pursuit of Jesus Christ my savior, my Lord, my friend, and my brother.