

Sunday Sermon: September 15, 2019

Sermon Text: Luke 13: 22-30

Sermon Theme: Be Prepared: The Way to Heaven is Narrow

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

He said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. <sup>25</sup> 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.’

<sup>26</sup> “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

<sup>27</sup> “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

<sup>28</sup> “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. <sup>29</sup> People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Pastors get asked a lot of questions about the Bible. I like those questions. Often they open doors to further conversation about Jesus and what he has done to save. I don’t have a problem with the easy question, I don’t have a problem with deep doctrinal questions either. But there is a type of question I struggle with. It’s the question that comes from a person who wants an un-Biblical answer to be correct.

Well Pastor, doesn’t the Bible say, God helps those who help themselves? Pastor, isn’t my loved one a guardian angel watching over me right now. Pastor, doesn’t God understand why I am never in church? Pastor, isn’t everyone going to heaven?

These questions aren’t challenging because the Biblical answer is all that difficult. The answer is challenging because I know that people are going to walk away upset when I give them the Biblical answer. Maybe you have been in a similar situation.

Instead of speaking the word boldly and confidently and lovingly guiding someone to the truth, I am tempted to hide God’s Word a little bit. I am tempted to protect God and myself from their anger by trying to find something that might make them feel better.

In the Word of God before us this morning, someone asks Jesus a tough question. Jesus does not hesitate to boldly, confidently and lovingly preach the Word in front of the whole crowd. In his answer, we will see God’s loving warning and encouragement. Be Prepared, The Way to Heaven is Narrow.

Jesus spent much of his time preaching and teaching. As the text tells us, he would travel from village to village and preach the message of salvation through faith in him as he went.

This was a message that was different from what the Jews had been taught by their Rabbis. No doubt there were many questions that the people had when they heard Jesus preach that he was the long-awaited Messiah and that faith in him would save.

We might be able to understand this man’s question if we understand where he is coming from. The Jews believed they were going to heaven because they were descended from Abraham. They believed they kept heaven theirs by following the Laws and being good. As long as one could trace his lineage to Abraham and could consider himself good, he would be assured of heaven.

But Jesus was teaching something different. He was not teaching salvation by lineage, or blood or works, he was teaching salvation through faith in him. When they heard Jesus teach this, the Jews rightly understood that Jesus was teaching that heaven was not theirs automatically by birthright.

It was easy to trace salvation by lineage, but salvation by faith is not so concrete. This man was really wondering who would be saved by faith.

The man’s question, “**Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?**” is a lot like those difficult questions that we might face. We might hear something similar from our friends and neighbors. What about those who have not heard, will they be saved? What about good people, will they be saved? What about people who believe in another god? Isn’t that faith? Won’t that save? What about people who don’t know they are sinning?

These are all tough questions, not because they are doctrinally difficult, but because the answer from God's Word is not one that many people want to hear. It goes against what they have been taught and what may seem right and fair to them.

Jesus' answer is clear and simple. **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many will try to enter and will not be able to."**

Jesus rightly points out that the man had asked the wrong question. Instead of worrying about others, who may or may not be saved, the man should worry about his own faith and his own salvation. Jesus was telling the man and us: Be prepared: **Make every effort to be found in faith so that you can enter through heaven through the narrow door.**

Like the Jews, we might be tempted to think that heaven is the final step of like for most people, including us. Instead of striving to grow in faith and in the knowledge of our Savior, instead of striving to be and abide in his Word and way, we might put it on cruise control and figure that we already on that path. It's so easy to be tempted to take the free and full salvation that Jesus has given us for granted. It is so easy to put God's Word lower on the list of things we have to do because God doesn't act like a boss who is always watching and checking to see if we are at church. He doesn't send out warnings if we miss our devotion, or Bible Study, or our worship.

We might be tempted to think that because a part of our lives was spent in faith, we were baptized, confirmed, and came to church for a time, that that means we are on the right path. Maybe our family and friends go to church all the time and we ask them to pray for us and we think that their prayers will finally bring us to heaven.

In Romans, Paul tells us that we can never rely on ourselves, our good works, or anything else to save us. **No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the Law, rather through the Law we become conscious of sin.**

Just as Jesus said, the apostle Paul tells us that there is only one way to enter heaven. He writes in Galatians, **"No one will be declared righteous before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."** And in Romans he says. **A righteousness from God has been revealed that is by faith from first to last."**

When Jesus says the door is narrow, he is not talking about how many people will get in, he is talking about the way that we enter the gift and blessing of heaven. Instead of many ways to enter his heaven, there is only one way: faith in him and what he has done for us.

Jesus tells us to be prepared to make every effort to have our faith strengthened through the Word. If we rely on ourselves, our actions, our past faithfulness, or the faithfulness of family and friends we are not prepared to enter heaven through the only door of faith in Jesus that there is. We are in danger of being in the group of people that Jesus tells, **"I don't know you or where you come from."**

Jesus wanted this man to believe and trust only in him and that's the same he wants for us. No matter how much we may try, we will never meet the perfection that God demands to get into heaven. That's why God sent Jesus to be perfect for us. No matter how strong we are, we are not strong enough to bear the punishment that will free us from our sins. That's why God sent Jesus to take the punishment on himself, that we might be free. He did that when he went to the cross and suffered for us. We cannot enter heaven through a door of our own making, we need Jesus to open the door of heaven for us.....and he has through his life, death and resurrection.

The door is narrow, but through Jesus, the door of heaven is open. Notice the good news that Jesus shares at the end of the lesson. **People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of heaven.** While the door is narrow, it is open to anyone from any nation anywhere, who believes in Jesus because Jesus has won the victory over sin, death and the devil and he gives that victory to us freely and fully.

Jesus wants us to be prepared standing firm in faith, but he also wants us to be prepared to answer those who ask because to show them that the only way to heaven is through the narrow door of faith in Jesus.

There are many who do not believe that Jesus is the only one way to heaven. There are many who are convinced that there are other doorways and that they will enter heaven another way. They are convinced that the door is wider than it is and must include them. They are convinced that even if they don't believe in Jesus, there must be a back door that they can get in at sometime. They are convinced that because they have a family member or friend who is faithful, that they will be let into heaven.

He wants us be prepared to stand firm in faith so that we can give a truthful answer to those who are struggling to find answers about heaven.

We speak the truth of God's Word. God's love for all people is clear. He says he loves all people and wants everyone to be saved. The way he has chosen to open heaven for all is clear. He has sent his Son to make salvation possible for each and every person in the whole world.

The Word does not need to be protected. God does not need to be protected. Jesus wants us to be prepared to speak the Word boldly, confidently, and lovingly. He wants us to know as we do this we are leading someone to the only truth that will lead to heaven.

Jesus wants us to be prepared, standing firm in faith, trusting in him and him alone for the heaven that is ours. He wants us to make every effort to hold onto that Word and not let it slip through our fingers. He wants us to make every effort to spend time in the Word which gives us opportunities for the Holy Spirit to increase our faith in him and our knowledge of him. And he wants us prepared to give an answer to those who need to hear the truth shared with them. The door may be narrow, but Jesus has opened for all people. May God bless us with the faith to speak his Word boldly, confidently and lovingly whenever we have cause to.