

Luke 13:22-30

September 2, 2007 – 14th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Enter through the Narrow Door

‡ Agonizing effort (vv.22-27)

‡ Freedom from agony (vv.28-30)

In the name of Jesus, God's only Door to heaven, dearly redeemed believers:

In these Last Days we're getting some serious lessons how quickly life can change. You fall asleep to the peaceful patter of raindrops, only for thunder to roll you out of bed in the lightning. You try the door but five feet of water holds it shut. You thought you escaped the Minnesota bridge disaster, but a "hundred-year flood" is destroying your town. Everyone hopes the weatherman isn't off by a century.

Could God be trying to tell us something? Are we listening? Floods and falling bridges don't care whether you're rich or poor. God has been telling us since the beginning of time and all the more intently since Christ came and sent His apostles into the world with His soul-saving Gospel. But can we trust Jesus? Does He care? And does He have the power to help us **Enter through the Narrow Door**?

‡ Agonizing effort (vv.22-27)

The answer in the first verse of our text we'll save for last and jump to verse 23 where someone asked Jesus, "**Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?**" Have you ever wondered the same thing? More literally people keep asking: "What if few are the saved?" or, "What about people who didn't have a chance?" My brother Nathan usually answers, "Find one." I like to point out how the Gospel has circled the globe so many times that ancient Chinese characters picture wonderful Bible stories of God's saving grace. "**The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands**" (Psalm 19:1 NIV) in constellations of the Zodiac with the virgin in Virgo and Pisces, the fish, and the hero Orion killing the serpent and the bull. As the Gospel stories were corrupted into superstitious horoscopes, God gave His written Word which covers the earth in radio waves and Internet connections.

As usual, Jesus gives a better answer than any of us. Since the question basically criticizes God as if He wants to damn people without giving them a chance, Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter. Instead of worrying about everyone else, think about your own soul first. We're too much like people who don't listen to flight attendants anymore: "In case of the loss of cabin pressure a panel will open above your seat and a mask will descend. Place the mask over your nose and mouth and breath normally. Then help someone next to you with theirs." Jesus knows that if you're unconscious spiritually, you can't help the guy or gal next to you even if they're your sweetheart or child.

Jesus is not ignoring the question. He's taking the questioners to where we all need to be. **He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."** Wait a minute! Aren't there many ways to heaven in all the religions? That's like asking, "Weren't there many ways to arrange the chairs on the deck of the *Titanic*?"

On a sinking ship or in a burning building can you escape through any door you want? Or might it help to get directions from someone who knows the way out? Jesus came from heaven to tell us, "**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.'**" "**Then you will say, '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. Away from me, all you evildoers!'"** – you workers of iniquity.

Everyone is working at something. State Fair goers struggle for spaces while neighbors work to profit parking them. Is the State Fair for spending or for earning? Yes, on both counts! But here Jesus is telling His fellow Jews that social contacts cannot substitute for saving faith anymore than parking next to

a car can keep you out of the street. Folks in Jesus' day will remember His face even without photos. "Hey, aren't you the rabbi from Nazareth that came to our town. We invited you to dinner. You taught in our streets!" But there is no salvation by association, only by faith. We all need to ask ourselves, "For whom do I work. And what am I producing?" How serious is this if Jesus calls His fellow Jews "workers of iniquity" and warns that "*All our righteous acts are like filthy rages*"? (Isaiah 64:6)

Somewhere a young man is running harder than he ever has in his life while a young woman practices beyond the pain, knowing it will only get worse until next summer. Before the Games begin in Beijing, every world class athlete spends **Agonizing effort** to prepare. That's what our Lord wants from each of us. No athlete can say, "I've got the gold!" before he competes. And no sinner can choose whatever way he wants to heaven. Since we've been so lazy instead of giving the **Agonizing effort** to **Enter through the Narrow Door**, how do we know Jesus still cares? How do we know He can help?"

✠ Freedom from agony (vv.28-30)

That's the verse we're saving for last. But we begin to see how Jesus cares as He talks about the agony of defeat. "*There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth...*" Personally, I don't like the sound of that. "*Weeping*" is sadness and "*gnashing of teeth*" is anger that cannot escape torment. Wouldn't it be better to have all the pastors and professors, the gurus and baggwans, tell people there is no hell, that a loving god would never damn anyone? Sure, and let's keep building bridges as in the sixties; just tell everyone they're safe. Proclaim the "Hundred-Year Flood" and forget building better highways that won't wash out. Why do people get so angry at government officials for lying, but demand God's representatives say whatever they want to hear? Don't they want **Freedom from agony**?

Jesus sure does, even for us Gentile, non-Jews. Jesus warned His own chosen nation of Israel: "*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. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.*"

The Jewish nation was chosen by God to cradle His Good News of a Savior and charged with telling others too. But their hatred for Gentiles increased as they forgot that their own Messiah was promised as a Savior for all. Jews kept killing God's prophets who warned about our sins so deep in our souls that no one can escape on his own. Yet God is so rich in mercy that He sent His only Son as the Messiah, the Christ, to suffer and die for the sins of Jews and Gentiles alike. We might not like the sound of "*weeping and gnashing of teeth,*" but the real question is whether Jesus knows and cares.

Did you catch the answer in the first verse? Christ's credentials for commanding us to **Enter through the Narrow Door** are all wrapped up in His *Resolute Journey*: "*Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.*" Luke does not give all Jesus' GPS coordinates from chapter nine to nineteen. In fact, Jesus never traveled more than 100 miles from where He was born in Bethlehem. Yet ten times in these key chapters the Holy Spirit inspires Dr. Luke to keep us tracking with Jesus on His determined route to the cross. He cared enough to die for you. He had the power to raise Himself from the dead as promised. He did not parachute to safety when humankind crashed in sin.

First put on your oxygen mask and breathe deeply of God's soul-saving love for you. God's exit light is on the **Narrow Door** through the wounds of His one and only Son. Run from the "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" before the fuel explodes on the Last Day. One-by-one on our knees in humble faith we find relief from guilt and fear in God's promised Christ. Safe in Him you can help others put on their oxygen mask and **Enter through the Narrow Door**. This is not the time to rearrange the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, or worry whether you got a headset for the movie. While fanatics shout, "Choose any door!" your Savior says, **Enter through the Narrow Door**. **Freedom from agony** has even better motivation for **Agonizing effort** in thankfulness to God for His grace. Come on in through Christ! Amen.