

## STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR

Luke 13:22–35

Key Verse: 13:24

“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able to.”

Do you know what “FOMO” is? Most young people do. It stands for “Fear Of Missing Out.” Both young and old have it. We’re afraid of missing out on a great bargain sale, or missing out on having fun at a party or on a vacation. Such “FOMO” is usually pretty silly. We’re so sensitive to missing out on things of the world, but oblivious to missing out on spiritual reality. In today’s passage Jesus urges us, “Strive to enter through the narrow door” (24). And he warns us that we might miss out. What does he mean? How can we accept what he’s saying? May God help us open our hearts and accept his words today.

Look at verse 22. “He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.” It’s the first time since 9:51 that Luke mentions where Jesus is going. While carrying out his ministry on this journey, Jesus mainly has been training his disciples. Most recently he’s been saying the time is short, he’s come to divide, and judgment is near. And somebody’s been listening. Look at verse 23. “And someone said to him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’” What a question! The guy is stunned. He’s aware Jesus is being followed by a crowd, but he’s not sure everybody in it really gets what he’s been saying. His question is kind of speculative.

Throughout this journey various people say various things to Jesus.<sup>1</sup> How does Jesus answer this man? Read verse 24. “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able to.” At first it seems Jesus is agreeing with him, that only a few will be saved. But that’s not his main point. What is it? Jesus is saying, “Don’t just speculate about it; get moving!” He’s giving us all a strong challenge: “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” What does he mean? The Greek root word for “strive” (cf. 1Ti4:10) can also mean to “compete” (1Co9:25), to “struggle” (Col1:29; 2:1; 4:12; Heb12:4), to “fight” (Jn18:36; 1Ti6:12; 2Ti4:7), or to “wrestle” (Eph6:12). Literally it’s our English word “agonize” (Lk22:44). We’ll come back to some of these meanings later. But as Christians, why do we have to strive so much? Aren’t

---

<sup>1</sup> (9:54,57,61; 10:17,25,29,37a,40; 11:1,27,45; 12:13,41; 13:1,23,31; 14:15; 17:5,12–13,20a,37a; 18:18,21,26,28,38–39; 19:8)

we supposed to just rest in God's grace and peace? Doesn't the Bible say that it doesn't depend on our will or exertion, but on God who has mercy (Ro9:16)? Do we have to strive so hard because so many people are trying to get through the same door all at once? No. Is it because the size of the door is too hard to fit through? Kind of. What does Jesus really mean to "strive to enter through the narrow door"? There are so many interpretations, and most are based on grasping, common sense knowledge, not on careful study of the passage itself.

To understand, we've first got to look at the context. Recently Jesus mentioned his upcoming "baptism," his death on the cross (12:50). He's aware his ministry is rapidly coming to a close. He's been doing mighty works and teaching amazing things, but people's responses have been disappointing (10:13–15; 11:31–32). He's been warning people repeatedly to repent (13:3,5). And through his parables he's given practical illustrations of what that means. But mostly, people were too proud to learn and respond. We also need to note that today's passage begins and ends with Jerusalem (22,33–34). In Jesus' day, Jerusalem was the bastion of the Jewish religion. It had the temple worship, all the religious leaders and their teachings, all the Jewish traditions, holidays and history. It also had so much pride. Jesus grieves over Jerusalem's historically bad habit of rejecting God's servants.

Moreover, in verses 25–30 Jesus describes certain hindrances to entering the narrow door. One is complacency (25). Like the folks in his parable, we'd like to take our sweet time and show up at the door when it's convenient, or only if we feel like it, believing somebody will just *have* to open the door for us. Another hindrance is presuming I'm okay (26). We think we're fine because we've grown up around Christianity, we've heard so many of Jesus' teachings, we've been around Christians a lot, our Christian parents are always pushing us. But are we really okay spiritually? The final thing Jesus mentions is our pride (30). We ignore the warning to enter through that door because we're pretty confident, not only that we'll get in, but that we'll be first. Jesus warns that with such an attitude, we may find ourselves being last. Complacency, thinking we're okay, being proud: they all prevent us from striving.

In light of these things, Jesus' words "strive to enter through the narrow door" refer to repentance. But what kind? In Jesus' parable, the door is "narrow." So a group of people can't get through it; it can be entered only by one person at a time. It's a genius way of saying that our repentance has got to be personal. At the same time, "the narrow door" refers to Jesus himself. In John 10:9 he said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." No matter how much we think we know, if we haven't really repented and accepted Christ personally, we haven't even gotten through the door.

And this word “strive” helps us better understand what repentance is. It’s not just saying a quick “sorry.” It’s got to go deeper than feelings. What is repentance? The Greek word “metanoeo” literally means a change of mind. Change our minds about what? First and foremost, about God. To repent, we’ve got to start taking God seriously. We’ve got to accept him deeply as my Creator, the Owner of my life, and start honoring him as God and giving thanks to him (Ro1:21). It’s hard if I’ve been living my entire life as if it’s all about me, as if God were not really there. So we need to struggle against our godless mindset.

We’ve also got to change our minds about the world around us. How so? Without God, our eyes are blinded by this world. We pursue worldly things as if they’re everything, as if obtaining the world will surely make us happy. We make idols out of things and people. Repentance means accepting what God says about the world. To do it, we’ve got to really fight against deceptive worldly influences.

Finally, we’ve got to change our minds about ourselves. We need to start seeing ourselves as sinners before God (Ro3:23). To see myself as a sinner doesn’t mean self-loathing or self-torture. It just means to stop making everything about me, stop all the self-promotion. It means to stop thinking of myself as a poor little victim. It means to stop thinking of myself more highly than I ought, and rather think of myself with sober judgment (Ro12:3). It means to take a good, hard look at who I really am—including all that I’m ashamed of. It means to stop trying to fabricate my own righteousness, stop thinking my goodness, my abilities, my efforts will ever be enough. Most of all, it means to simply start taking responsibility for all the wrongs I’ve done. Changing our mindset about ourselves is so hard. No wonder Jesus uses a word that means to agonize.

But striving to enter through the narrow door doesn’t mean becoming narrow-minded and legalistic. Rather, it means becoming humble enough to accept God’s grace in Jesus. It means to fully digest this grace that I can never earn and can never deserve and can only receive by faith. Striving to know this grace, experience this grace, depend on this grace, live in this grace. And it’s just the start. The Bible urges us to continue in this grace (Ac13:43) and stand firm in this true grace of God (1Pe5:12b). We all need to keep striving to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who deserves all the glory both now and to the day of eternity (2Pe3:18).

Striving to enter through the narrow door means to change not only our thinking but also our practical direction. Now, with hope in the living God, we need to train ourselves for godliness, to toil and strive for it (1Ti4:7b–10). Ultimately, this points us all to the way of the cross. It’s the way our Lord Jesus taught. He said, “If anyone would

come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (9:23). It’s not the way of the world, the way of grabbing everything, the way of self-indulgence. It’s the way of self-denial and suffering and losing. It’s the humble way Jesus himself took. It’s the way he himself agonized to obey (22:44).

And there’s another important element of the narrow door. What is it? Read verse 25. “When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’” It means the time to enter will eventually be over. Who gets to decide that time? Not us, but God. If we’ve never responded to Jesus, never repented, never received his grace, never accepted his way of the cross, one day we’ll hear the most tragic words ever: “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!” (27) It seems like such a threat. But actually our God is so gracious. In fact, he’s begging us not to receive his grace in vain. He tells us: “‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2Co6:1–2). God himself is inviting us today to open our hearts and receive his grace in Jesus. Please don’t wait a minute longer. If you’ve never done it, do it today, right now.

To help us, Jesus says more about the kingdom of God, describing what it’s like on the other side of the narrow door. Read verses 28–29. “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.” What’s his point? He’s saying that in God’s kingdom, nobody is entitled. Everybody gets in only by his grace. If we’re not living by the grace of Jesus, no matter how confident we are, we’ll find ourselves cast out. In fact, in his grace so many unexpected, overlooked and forgotten people will get in, whereas so many privileged people we thought would surely be there, won’t be. We’ll be looking around and see somebody we never imagined would be there and say, “*You* got in? What?!?” Then, we’ll be looking for that person we surely thought would be there and won’t be able to find him or her, and all we’ll be able to say is one long “Whoa!” God is still working to bring the most unlikely people from the remotest places on earth to dwell and feast with him in his kingdom. All we need do is enter through the narrow door of his grace in Jesus.

In the last part of today’s passage some Pharisees come and tell Jesus to get away from there, saying that Herod is trying to kill him (31). But Jesus is not at all dissuaded. He’ll continue doing his miracles and moving forward to his final destination

in Jerusalem. He knows he won't be killed until he gets there (32–33). When he thinks of this end, is he fearful or discouraged? Not at all. Quite the opposite. He's actually grieving over his people. He says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (34) His heart is broken over his stubborn, rebellious people.

Read verse 24 again. May God help us strive to enter through the narrow door of real repentance and receiving God's grace in Jesus. May he help us strive to follow the way of the cross our Lord Jesus gave us. May God help us grow in the hope of his kingdom and in his broken heart for those who are unrepentant.