

Luke 13:22-30. ²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ 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.’ ²⁶ “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ ²⁸ “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. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Rejoice in the victory feast that comes through Christ.

- 1. Recognize that Jesus is the narrow door**
- 2. Hear his call to daily repentance and relentless preparation.**

The 2016 Summer Olympics officially ended on Sunday. For the last few weeks many people from all over the world have turned their attention to these events that bring some of the finest athletes from all over the world to compete on what most would consider the largest stage in international sports. In the end some 11,500 athletes from 206 nations, competed for 306 sets of medals in 28 different sports. Athletes from all over the world were gifted with talent and ability. Some with plenty of talent lacked focus in their preparation or in their execution or in their ability and fell short of their final goal, others gifted with talent and made ready by persistent preparation were able to enjoy the sweet taste of victory.

In our lesson for today we are reminded how Jesus brings people together from all nations and yet those who will dine at the victory feast of heaven they each receive that honor in a rather specific way. Therefore, we rejoice in the extensive grace of God as He reaches out to all nations in Christ. But we also recognize that Jesus is the narrow door and we hear his call to daily repentance and relentless preparation.

As Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem, someone asked him, “*Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?*” It seemed that this individual was concerned. This person even wondered out loud if heaven was so exclusive that only a few people would make it. One might wonder how this person came to this question? Well, it is said that some Rabbis during the time of Jesus taught that all Israelites would have a share in the world to come. Jesus however, was not one to shy away from warning those who were confident in their own salvation to watch out that they do not miss out God’s eternal kingdom. And so maybe this person is suddenly concerned because of Jesus’ teaching on repentance, or his words of woe against the pious Pharisees, after all, if these religious leaders

these pious men couldn't do enough to be saved, who could? Or maybe this person may have been looking toward the holy city of Jerusalem that Jesus was heading towards and he or she thought that location or status or race had something to do with your chance for salvation. Those Jews who actually lived in Jerusalem would certainly be favored and those who lived in the small surrounding villages would be overlooked. Or maybe it was just the elite that would make the final cut. We can only make educated guesses about what exactly was behind this question, but whatever the thinking this question indicates genuine concern. And of course in this line of questioning it is safe to assume that this person asked this question with this in mind, "Am I going to be included?"

The Lord Jesus answered in a way that was a bit surprising. One might expect Jesus to assure this person of their salvation, to dismiss this notion that only a few people are going to be saved and make it wide open for all to enter in. Instead he turns the conversation in a different direction. He replies, not just to the one who asked the question, but to the entire crowd and he says, ²⁴ ***"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."*** Now notice Jesus doesn't really get into a discussion of numbers with the individual who asked this question, but he gets to the heart of the matter. He doesn't answer directly if there will be many or few who are going to be saved, but Jesus takes this opportunity to remind the people of the one requirement of salvation. Eternal salvation is through faith in him alone.

While he does not limit the number in heaven to a select few he does remind the people that entrance into heaven comes in one specific way. And so first and foremost, we must remember Jesus is the narrow door. It is through his teaching, his message, his life of salvation, his innocent death, and his glorious resurrection that any one is saved. As sinners we sometimes fall into the thinking that our salvation is based on how we do in comparison to others. We get into that spiritually competitive spirit as we judge ourselves by the fact that at least I am better than that guy over there, or I haven't done or said the kind of things that she has done or said. But that strategy for salvation and peace quickly falls apart when sin erupts in our life, when we stumble and fall, when we are overcome by stress and frustration. Our righteousness unravels, becomes untied like a shoelace and we trip, we stumble, we fall, we disqualify ourselves so clearly for the prize.

We have to see that we could never save ourselves. We could never do enough to earn God's favor or appease God's wrath over our many sins. But by God's grace we are reminded by our Savior that it is not just the best of the best that are saved, but he saves sinners. The last will be first. Our Savior Jesus Christ covers us in his goodness, his perfection. We who stumble and fall and fail to execute God's required tasks perfectly have been given this good news that through faith in Christ Jesus he throws us on his back and he carries us to victory. Jesus is the narrow door. He is the way to eternal victory. He alone.

Secondly, Jesus urges his hearers to ***"make every effort to enter through the narrow door"***. With this call to struggle to enter through the narrow door we again must remember that Jesus is not calling sinners to try to earn heaven by their deeds and efforts or their pious training, but rather he is reminding them to remain in him and his teaching. We are to struggle against that which would pull the sinner away from that narrow door, away from him and his gift of salvation, so that we might miss out on eternal life. Jesus remains the narrow door. His

obedience, his forgiveness, his message of salvation, Christ himself remains the only way to enter into the kingdom of God, therefore with these words Jesus calls us to relentless preparation so that we remain in him.

As Jesus continues his illustration, he reminds us why this is so important. Jesus continues his parable by describing that door not only as being narrow but he describes also how the door will eventually be closed by the owner of the house. He speaks to the crowd with words that are meant to light a fire in their hearts, to fan the flame of the gift of the Spirit, so that each individual might take seriously the need to know and believe in Jesus as their Savior. For the time will come in each person's life and in the history of the world when the entrance to salvation will be closed, the door locked. We are to be on guard that we do not end up on the wrong side of the door. Jesus reminds the crowd that on that final day, it would not be enough that they were once in that crowd and heard Jesus preach, it would not be enough that they were born into the Jewish nation, it would not be enough that they had some general association with Jesus, what would matter, what would make all the difference is that they would know and believe and be connected to Christ Jesus as their Savior. Jesus alone is the way in, he is the gate, he is narrow door. And so he says to all who would listen. ²⁴ ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ 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.’ ²⁶ ‘Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ ‘But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ ²⁸ ‘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.***

That connection to Christ is vital. We are to see that God's gift of saving faith is nourished and strengthened. Just as an athlete who is gifted with initial talent can't turn his back on preparation, so too we cannot go about our lives under the assumption that because we have a general association with Christ that we will be saved. Just as those in the crowd who listened to Jesus speak could not simply bank on the fact that were all set because they heard Jesus speak a couple times or even because they ate and drank with him on occasion, we too cannot assume that because we heard his word a couple times, or that we have a good idea of who he is, or we were baptized on this day in this church, or took this class from this pastor, or were born into this church and attended this many times - whatever the general connection may be - we cannot assume such a loose connection to Christ is going to get us into heaven. It is not as though Jesus ushers in entire nations, or groups of people or families, or entire confirmation classes or congregations into heaven, just because we all kind of know Jesus. Rather, the matters of faith and salvation are dealt with us on an individual basis. As he came to you in a personal way in baptism, he desires and expects that a personal relationship would continue. He is the narrow door. One by one we will stand before him and he will look at our heart and so we recognize with great joy that Jesus is the way in, that he is the narrow door, and we listen to his call for daily repentance and relentless preparation.

However, the temptation comes in so many different forms to become stale in our faith. The gift of faith is taken for granted, the gift of baptism neglected, we assume church membership,

or blood lines, status in the community or church, or general piety is all we need and so we settle in, we become apathetic in our lives of faith and we grow careless in our watchfulness. If an Olympic athlete was to rely merely on the gift of talent or past accomplishments and was lax and lazy in his or her preparations in most, if not all cases, things would not go well for them. The first may very likely would be last if there was no training between one Olympics to the next. What shame he would bring upon himself, his sport, and even his country! How can we ever dare to approach eternal judgment in a similar way? What shame we would bring upon ourselves and our God and his calling for us! God has given us the gift of faith! He has given us salvation and victory in Christ Jesus! He has saved us from eternal defeat and in his grace placed his name on us through Baptism. We are put on his team. He has given us his Holy Word which saves us and inspires us and instructs to live for him. We are called to represent him in this world and so he calls us to daily repentance and relentless preparation all the while he is right there with us encouraging us, running alongside us and we run our race of faith.

Dear Christian, make every effort! Those who by their own effort would be last are now first. Those lost and condemned, crushed and overpowered by sin are given victory in Christ. Jesus came down and with perfect execution of God's commands earned for us a perfect score, he lifted us up out of the fiery clutches of eternal defeat and he gives us a place at the victory feast of heaven through his life, through his death, through his victorious resurrection. God's grace to us is great, it is extensive extending to people from all nations, and it is awesome! Our God extends his love and victory to us! People from every nation, tribe, language and people, and you and I will be there at the victory feast in the kingdom of God. Not because of our own merit or ability or purity, but because of goodness and love Christ our crucified and risen Savior. You and I are eternally victorious, the last will be first, sinners are declared to be saints, thanks be to God! And so let us live our lives in continual thanks to our gracious God. Let us heed his call to daily repentance and relentless preparation. Let us make every effort to enter with him in glory by being connected to him who guides us from grace to glory.

What a moment it must be to be an Olympian gathered among the greatest athletes in their sport. Imagine the thrill to bear the name of your county, to be lifted up to do your best, to make every effort to do what you were made to do. What a thrill, what a joy it is for us to do what we were created to do, to live for our God, to represent him as best we can as we run the race of life. What a privilege and an honor to serve him, to be connected to him, each and every day. What a thrill! And what a joy it will be for us to be gathered among people from every nation at the victory feast of heaven, not just for a few weeks, but for all eternity.

As we stumble and fall. As we struggle in our walk of faith, occasionally we will wonder, "Am I really included?" You are! By God's grace the last will be first. The lowly sinner who believes in Jesus is declared victorious in Christ. He will know you. He will welcome you in and show you to your place reserved by faith at the victory feast of heaven. Let us recognize and proclaim that Jesus is the only way, the narrow door to this feast of victory. And in daily thanksgiving and eternal gratitude let us each hear our Savior's voice as he calls us to a life of daily repentance and relentless preparation giving thanks each day for that eternal victory that is found in him alone. AMEN.