



Strive to Enter the Kingdom

Luke 13:22-24

May 16, 2021

As we reengage our minds in the study of Luke's Gospel, I'd just invite you to turn back again to that, beloved book, and you can turn to the middle of Luke 13, Luke chapter 13. We are entering into a new section in this place, Luke 13:22, a new section in, in this Gospel. It's got a clear theme and it starts in Luke 13:22 and continues on through Chapter 16.

It's a section here of strong evangelistic concern. And it's thematic in this sense, I mean, Jesus has obviously been preaching the good news of the Kingdom ever since he began, so he's had an evangelistic concern all through his ministry. But there is a stronger evangelistic concern as Jesus is pushing his people, the nation of Israel, pushing them toward a decision.

His life, his work, his teaching, demands a verdict, demands decision and so he is provoking them to think carefully about themselves in light of his teaching. In light of his commands. Comfortable people don't like to be discomforted, do they? Self-assured people don't like it when their reasons for assurance are challenged. When the ground of confidence that they've had in their lives is unsettled and even removed.

People tend to like what is familiar, what is easy, what's comfortable. People prefer to remain, at rest. I mean, we can all detect this in ourselves, don't we? I mean, who wants a chaotic life? So we work toward managing things so that they're easy and comfortable, so that we're at ease in our souls and our minds; were comfortable, and we remain at rest.

As I've shared the gospel with people, as I've called people to repentance and faith and obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, it's quite often that I've heard some variation of these words. I've heard this more often than I care to remember. I'll come to Christ later. I'll obey his words soon. I'll get to that, but not yet. Have you heard that? Have you heard those



words that sentiment? Whatever it is in that person. A lifestyle that they want to maintain; a man or a woman that they want to pursue. A particular course of action that they intend to take. Some option that they want to keep open and on the table. Whatever it is, it's sinful when posed against the demands of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I'm gonna do it anyway. I'll ask for forgiveness later. God will forgive me, after all, God is a loving, forgiving God.

They've been taught that by many churches. It's nothing more than wicked presumption. It's presuming on the grace of God. It's taking his patience and kindness for granted. Sinners want the easy route. Nothing too disruptive to their lifestyle, nothing to make them ill at ease. Nothing to change them, actually.

As I said, it's whatever's familiar, comfortable whatever keeps them at rest. It's really Newton's first law of motion, right? Law of inertia. A body at rest tends to stay at rest until acted upon by an external force. Well, nation of Israel body at rest, meet Jesus, the net external force.

Look at verse 22 of Chapter 13. "Jesus went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, 'Lord, will those who are saved be few? 'And he said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able, 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. "And he will answer you." 'I do not know where you come from.'

"Then," you will begin, "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. '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, but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and West and from North and South, and recline at the table in the Kingdom of God. Behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last?'"

Now if that doesn't disrupt the inertia of Israel, the only thing that they can expect is certain judgment. That's what he describes here. The same warning, beloved. The same warning applies to us. To follow this same exhortation, strive, it's a present tense, "be striving to enter through the narrow door."

We're going to focus our attention this morning on those first three verses, 22, 23 and 24. Those verses set the scene that give the occasion and they provide the thesis. That Jesus gives and explain everything that follows. So what follows in verses 25 to 27 is a kind of parable. Some call it a prophetic allegory. Parables tend to be given in the third person.

Jesus in this section uses the second person. To point the finger at the people in this nation, he speaks prophetically to the people of Israel, targeting them directly with his parable. And then, verses 28 and 29, he follows that prophetic parable with a judgment oracle. He gives these people, who would reject his invitation, he gives them kind of a preview of what judgment



is gonna look like. And it's a terrifying, terrifying thing to imagine.

What pain and regret that they will suffer, when they see the door closed, that they can't get through, and everybody else is on the inside and they're on the outside. This is for all who failed to strive now to enter the Kingdom. And then verse 30 sums it up with a proverbial summary.

So we're going to see today how Luke sets the scene, and we're gonna look at the prophetic pictures next week. So three points for your notes this morning, the setting, the occasion and the thesis. The setting, the occasion, and the thesis, and what I want you to listen out for today, whether you're not a Christian and you're visiting with us today, so glad to have you here. Whether you're not a Christian listening on the live stream, we're so glad you're, you're streaming with us.

So whether you're not a Christian or whether you do profess to be a Christian, I want you to listen to what Jesus has to

say. I want you to listen self critically. I want you to listen with a view to doing some honest, might be painful, but you'll get through it, some honest self-evaluation. To do some self-examination this morning.

Ask yourself this question: Am I a comfort seeker? Do I live to gain or maintain ease? Comfort as a primary goal in my life. Do I want to remain comfortable? Do I, do I wanna keep this body at rest from moving. Do I wanna keep my soul at ease so I don't have anything challenging me. So I don't need to get up and do something actually with any of this command stuff in the Bible.

So let's be honest about that. If we detect it, let's call it what it is, it's sin in us. And for that sin we need to repent. For you professed Christ, you should be thinking even now, about your heart as you come to observe the Lord's table at the end of the service. Whoever, whether it's an unbelieving person in the fellowship or whether it's the professing Christian, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord



in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord.

Did he strive? Did he strain? Did he go through difficulty? Did he always live that way? Don't sin against the body and the blood of the Lord by staying committed to your own comfort. Let a man examine himself and so eat the bread and drink of the cup.

So be honest as you listen today. Examine yourself before the Lord, because behold, now is the acceptable time now. Behold, now is the day of salvation. If you have sin, if you're not saved, let's deal with that today. Deal with it today.

Alright, so three points. The setting, the occasion, the thesis. First, the setting and the setting is what we're need, what we need to see here is that for Jesus, the setting is that there is a cause for increasing urgency, in his message. A cause for increasing urgency in his message, and especially particularly this, to demand a verdict. To call for decision.

And we're riding the fence regarding Jesus Christ and his demands on your life. And he has a cause for increasing urgency.

Luke begins the section with a travel note. It's the first of several travel notes that will be coming in his Gospel. Look at verse 22. Jesus went on his way or he was going on his way. Luke is by the verb showing progression here.

So he's going on his way and he's going on his way through towns and villages. This is the program he's set up earlier in Chapter 10, sending evangelists before him to announce his arrival, to preach the Good News of the Kingdom, to heal with Kingdom power. To prepare that village, town, city, for his arrival. Rejecting towns would not even be visited. They would not show up on the itinerary. But those towns that had even one family and one home that would be receptive, Jesus would visit them. The apostles put them on the itinerary, and they went and visited.

And so he's going through the towns and the villages here in Judea. He's teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. He's got his eyes set on Jerusalem. Now in this travel note, there's no precise time given, no exact location. But by comparing this with other Gospel, the other Gospels, we know Jesus has entered into the Perea phase of his ministry that's in the region of Perea.

The other Gospels are explicit citing this in Matthew 19:1, Mark 10:1, John 10:40. He's visiting the communities of the Jews who live in the region of Perea. Perea, if you kind of look at the maps in the back of your Bible, you can see it's on the east side of the Jordan River. The Jordan River, River is the western boundary of Perea. Shared, that same boundary, is shared by Samaria to the West. So Perea is situated between the Sea of Galilee in the north and the Dead Sea to the south. Galilee, the territory region of Galilee, is to the northwest, and Judea is to the southwest, and Perea is to the east.

Politically, Perea is under the rule of Herod Antipas, along with Galilee to the northwest. So Jesus having ministered

already in Galilee, having saturated Galilee with the Kingdom teaching in the earlier part of his ministry, he's now returned here to Herod's jurisdiction by entering into Perea.

Herod Antipas, it puts him in potential danger, as that's you can see that indicated by verse 31. When the Pharisees warned Jesus about Herod Antipas. Hey, he's wanting to kill you. Get outta here. Luke's travel note, as I said, it's the first of several to come in Luke's gospel. These travel notes really remind us that Jesus is continuing to pursue this program of preaching the Kingdom, healing people, showing Kingdom power, validating his message by his works, and his power, and his strength and his authority. And yet he doesn't stick around. He preaches, he calls for verdict, and he moves on. He is continuing to move toward his goal.

Because he's come to accomplish a mission, he's been given a mission by the father. He wants to fulfill the scripture he wants to fulfill the will of his Father in Heaven. And as he told his disciples in Luke 9:22 here's the mission. Here's the plan. "The son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by

the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

That mission is always on his mind. That mission is, is, is, is set before him, always. He knows that his time right now is drawing to a close, and I think that's part of what intensifies the sense of urgency that he feels in his teaching. It's the same message of entering into God's Kingdom that he's been preaching all along, but he senses an urgency for people to respond because the time is so short. Wants them to respond now, before it's too late.

Nothing has changed in the message, though, he has always taught on the difficulty of entering into the Kingdom. May remember the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus drew his sermon to a close there by calling for a response there, to enter into the Kingdom of God, to receive the offer of the Kingdom. Matthew 7:13 to 14. This is what he said, "Enter by the narrow gate," sounds very similar to what we're reading here in our text, "enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and



the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many."

Folks, those aren't unreligious people. Those aren't irreligious people. Those aren't pagans. Those are religious people on the, going through the wide gate and taking the easy road. And I know you know that there are many churches who are wide gate churches, easy road churches, but those lead to destruction.

Many are going through there, but "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. Those who find it are few." So as Jesus says something very similar in our text later in his ministry, comes with a warning. That the gate, the entrance onto the way, and then verse 24 the door, this opportunity is coming to an end.

Access will soon be denied. And Jesus can see that very soon, verse 25, the people to whom he speaks, the people he's looking at their faces. He can see eye to eye. He looks at their

body language, he looks at their facial expression, he loves these people, dearly. These people to whom he speaks are gonna be stuck outside one day.

The Master of the house will get up, slam the door shut. The banquet of celebration is gonna proceed, but without these people. It's part of what intensifies his concern here. He knows the time is short. The cross is just a few months away. This door of opportunity is soon going to close. But there's another reason his concern increases.

It's, corresponds to this opportunity closing, but Jesus has been on the move, as we said, ever since Luke 9:51. When he determined to go to Jerusalem, he's eager to complete his mission. He came to die for the sins of his people. He came to grant their full access into God's Kingdom before God's throne, that they might call God Father like he does.

And in Luke 9:51, we read, you can look at it there, if you like to, flip back Luke 9:51, we see, "When the days drew near

for him to be taken up he set his face to go to Jerusalem."

That's Luke 9:51. Luke 9:22 about thirty verses earlier he just said the Son of Man is gonna be rejected, suffer many things, be rejected, die. And he's determined to get there. He's resolute.

He's determined, he's unwavering. There's an expression used, his face is set like flint. Which means for the rest of his time on this earth during his first Advent for the rest of this mission, until he gets to the cross, Jesus is gonna continue to be on the move. Now here in chapter 13, Jesus is just a few short months away from the cross. He's been traveling and as he's been traveling, Jesus has witnessed a disturbing attitude among his people.

He's been through Galilee, all through Galilee. He's been through Judea, ventured into Samaria, and now he's come into Perea. And the entire land of Israel is inhabited by comfortable people. People who are spiritually lazy. People who are asleep. They are at ease but at ease for no good reason.

And Jesus knows that for these people judgment is coming. Divine judgment for the rejection of Israel's Messiah, so as he, as he visits with the people, going from town to city to village to hamlet he's, as he visits with them, they seem to be fast asleep. They seem to be resting on their laurels. They're, they're happily settled in a false assurance.

Synagogue attendance. Ritual observance. Participation in the synagogue duties. Jewish identity in all parts of the country. Whether it's large cities like Jerusalem or smaller towns like Capernaum or villages and hamlets of the rural areas, people are trusting in the wrong things. They haven't even attained to the list we read out of Philippians chapter 3 that Paul had. They're not even close.

But they're still resting in that, their spiritual heritage, their religious works, the fact that Moses and the Prophets are read to them every Sabbath. The fact that they listen to preaching every week. Probably talk about things, discuss. Now that Jesus has come. Preaching the Kingdom with divine authority, doing miracles with divine power, he's claiming

before them to be the fulfillment of all the texts about the Messiah. He is their Messiah, and people aren't listening to his call to repentance and faith.

They hear his commands but they bounce off the ears. Like that's for somebody else, I'm good. And his visitation, becomes just one more thing that they can take for granted. One more reason for a false sense of assurance. Down in verse 26, the mere fact of the Messiahs' visiting them is the basis of their argument there isn't it? The reason that he should let them enter, why, "we ate and drank in your presence. You taught in our streets." We're simpatico. We're familiar with you.

Look proximity to the Messiah means nothing without true obedience to his teaching. Without heeding his call to repentance and faith, listening to his preaching means nothing when there's no saving relationship to the Messiah. Familiarity breeds contempt. When there is no love, there is no joy, there is no true gratitude in God. There's no heart to follow Jesus as Lord in obedience. So again, as Jesus walked through the land

following his itinerary, he, he's visiting all these cities, towns, villages, he's seeing an unregenerate people.

An unregenerate Israel, unconverted and lost, and yet they're deluded into thinking they're fine. They'd embraced a false gospel. They'd received a false assurance, and that inoculated them against loving Christ and obeying his Gospel. So Jesus, he's here increasingly concerned. And he intends to provoke his people to repentance and faith. He wants to provoke them to some sober self-reflection, to some thoughtful self-examination.

He wants them to ask the most important question in life, Will I participate in the Kingdom blessing? Will I be at that banquet table? Will I be there with the Patriarchs and the Prophets. Will I enter into the Kingdom of Heaven or am I going to be cast aside?"

We face the same challenge today folks. The same challenge with so many of our fellow Americans inoculated by sub-Christian

substandard false gospels. False gospels have saturated this land. Come to Jesus and he'll fulfill you. Feel that God shaped hole in your heart. You know that thing you're trying to fill with all kinds of bad things? Jesus will be there. Come to Jesus and he'll heal all your emotional hurts and wounds. Come to Jesus, you'll be happier now. You'll have health, wealth, and prosperity. And you get Heaven when you die. What a deal. Sign here. Pray this prayer.

It's kind of like what David Wells described back in 1995 when he writes this. "What people who are coming in these church doors today are thinking about and what they want is not primarily personal salvation. That is to be forgiven before a holy and righteous God. That's not what they're thinking about. What they want is a sense of personal wellbeing, however momentary and fragmentary that personal sense of wellbeing is."

And churches are catering to this. Churches see them as consumers satisfy the consumer, give the consumer what he wants. Consumer is king. Gotta keep them in the seats. Gotta keep them coming through the doors. Gotta keep the coffers filled with

their money. Gotta keep the show going and say what satisfies them. They want wellbeing, give'em wellbeing. They want good instruction for their kids to make them more moral, great; give it to them. Have kids programs, fill the church with programs.

They're consumers of salvation by psychology. They seek therapy for their brokenness, they're consumers who see the church as yet another mental health provider. And they're considering care options. Oh, they believe in Jesus just fine. They say he died for their sins, so they're fine with the whole spiritual side of the house. Now they need to tend to their psychological wellbeing. They gotta take care of their mental health.

So they submit to every prescription from the world. They follow every therapeutic strategy and none of it has anything to do with what Christ commanded, none of it. To repent and believe, to identify those issues in your life, is not reasons for therapy. To identify them as sins.

Because sins can be confessed, sins can be repented over. Sins you can find forgiveness from God for. Sins can, you can be delivered from. When you observe their lives. None of that stuff they've been following from the world has helped them at all to obey Christ. None of it has produced in them the fruit of the Spirit. None of that has, has, has enabled and strengthened their practice of true biblical love for God and for other people. None of it has enabled them to follow, walk in biblical wisdom. They remain saturated with sin, enamored with the world. Dominated by worldly thinking. Submitted to worldly philosophies because they are disinterested in spiritual things.

Sin seeps through their pores of their personality. And it's so familiar to them that they can't even identify it as wrong anymore. Can't challenge their delusion, though. You can't disrupt their false assurance because they bought a false gospel and they cling to it.

Same thing in Jesus' day, same thing. Nothing new under the sun, right? People are the same. People lived under the same delusions they told themselves, the same lies. They assured



themselves that they were safe, spiritually healthy, no concern for their eternal future, the reality of it anyway.

Which is why Jesus keeps pressing the same kinds of questions into their consciences. You've been showing up, you've been listening to my teaching, but you yourself, will you enter into my Kingdom. That's the question. Again, proximity to the truth is not what counts. Obedience to the truth that is the issue.

So that's the setting, that's the setting for today. Let's look at the second point and see the occasion. And the occasion, there's a question that comes up out of the crowd, and the occasion is a question, I think I'm not uncharitable in saying this, but it's a pointless curiosity. It's an idle curiosity. It's a, it's a futile question. I'll show you that and show you why that's not uncharitable to say that, but the occasion is that there's a question that comes up of really pointless curiosity.

Look at verse 23. Along the way Jesus has been teaching and someone is listening to him teach and speaks up during a pause in the teaching, and Jesus takes a drink of water or whatever, he steps into that gap and he says, "Lord, will those who are saved," or rather those who are being saved, "will they be few?" Will those who are being saved be few?

He's talking about the future. Talking about the number of people who are going to be saved. No doubt something in Jesus' teaching prompted the question. He's been teaching on the Kingdom; this seems like something that fits right into that genre of teaching. We don't know exactly what it was that Jesus said that provoked this, but Luke tells us nothing about the questioner.

Whether he's a believer, whether he's an unbeliever, we don't know is he a follower of Jesus or his is just some face in the crowd. But addressing Jesus as Lord, well, that might favor the view that he really is a disciple. We just don't know for sure. Whatever we can discern about the questioner and the impetus of the reason for his question, it has to come from

Jesus' response to the question. The answer. We have to discern and kind of reverse engineer back to what this guy is thinking about. We can reverse, we can reverse engineer and understand a good bit about this.

The question itself, we do know the background of the question is a contemporary theological debate among rabbis about the number of the elect has been batted around among, among rabbis for centuries. Is it many or is it few? And they're divided into two camps, basically. The first and more popular view was that all Israel would be saved. All except for the most flagrant, flagrant sinners, the all those social rejects, like the prostitutes and tax collectors and all that riffraff.

They won't be saved, obviously. We're gonna talk about the righteous Israel, you know, good neighbor Israel, those people. If you had biblical support, if you look at passages like Isaiah 60:21, "your people shall all be righteous. They shall possess the land forever." which they interpreted as the entire nation would be saved.

The opposite view, the more restrictive view, is that just a few, just a holy remnant would be saved and view was popular among many rabbis. It's, and it's summarized in an apocryphal work called 4 Ezra. It's in your, if anybody has an Apocrypha, it's 2 Ezras. 2 Ezras is for chapters 3 to 14, I believe, and that's 4 Izra, 4 Ezra. Apocryphal text, not inspired Scripture.

So written in that text conveyed, by the voice of an Angel who speaks to Ezra, the historical Ezra, says this, summarizing this view that the few only the few would be saved in the end. "The most high made this world for the sake of many. But the world to come for the sake of only a few. But I tell you a parable, Ezra, just as when you ask the earth, it will tell you that it provides a large amount of clay from which earthenware is made, and only a little dust from which gold comes. So is the course of this present world. Many have been created, but only a few shall be saved."

Again, that apocryphal account is not Scripture. It's not inspired. It's not breathed out by God. But they could find biblical support for that view in Isaiah 10:22, "Although your

people Israel be is the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return." And for the rest, the many, not the remnants they believe the rest of that text confined all of those to judgment because destruction is decreed, it says in that verse. The next verse says the Lord God of hosts will make a full end, as decreed in the midst of all the Earth.

So this guy comes asking a question. He's trying to draw Jesus into taking sides in this debate. Which one do you prefer, the many or the few. And in my mind's eye I like to picture this guy as a recent seminary graduate. This newly minted junior rabbi. Recently credentialed, he's eager to get to the bottom of stuff. He wants to, get down and find all the answers. Solve all the theological dilemmas in Israel and he's asking, which is it, Lord? Are there many being saved? All Israel, except for the worst? All Israel, or only a few being saved, just the remnant? Which side do you take? Lord? Which side of the controversy do you stand on?

Or maybe I'm giving this guy a little too much credit. Maybe he's just one of those debate groupies, you know, likes to

show up and watch the fight. If he lived today, he'd be wasting a lot of time watching debates on YouTube, following all his favorite apologetics gurus. This is the guy maybe, that likes the good intellectual tennis match. Ideas batted back and forth across the net. Good sport. Interesting, even fun to watch.

But for all intent, purposes, everything practical, this hearer, this questioner, comes away unchanged and cemented in his opinions. When he watches the debate, when he watches the fight, he takes a side. He affirms himself in whatever side he's watching, right? So my justification for describing the questioner in admittedly less than flattering terms, it's because of the essence of his question.

If you look more closely and consider what he's asking, you consider the information he's seeking from the Lord, he says. "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Look, whatever the answer is to that question. What does he think he's going to do with that information? First thing about the question, whatever that answer might be, it has very, this question has very little

to do with himself, right? It, it has no practical bearing on his life.

In other words, if Jesus answered his question with a straight forward yes or straight forward no, what's he gonna do with the information, right? If Jesus even gave the exact number of the elect of God ordained and chosen before the foundation of the world. Here's the number. I mean, what difference practically is that gonna make in his life?

What possible benefit could that be to him to know that number? How would he live his life differently in light of that knowledge? That Deuteronomy 29, he should pay attention to that the secret things belong to the Lord, right? The things revealed belong to us and our children that we might what, do them. Put them into practice. Live them out. Cautionary note from Moses of Wisdom.

Another thing about his question. The question kind of reveals an assumption, doesn't it? That he assumes that he is

included in that number, of those being saved, whether the number is many or just very few, a remnant, he counts himself there. Because if he had any doubt about that, he would have asked a very different question. Lord, I know I don't care about arithmetic here. I care about arithmetic having to do within an integer, one, me. I'm concerned about only one number mine. How can I know that I have eternal life? He doesn't ask that question.

He asked kind of a question of idle curiosity. And nevertheless, Jesus receives the man's question, as he does so many times, and he pivots expertly from that question, whatever it is, and he applies it for a more general teaching. Broadens it out to the whole crowd. He does answer the question for him. We'll get to that. Probably not today, but he gets to that. It's not in the way the man expected.

But he, when he answers, it says the end of verse 23, and one man answered the question and he said to them, plural, he's broadening this out to the whole crowd. So rather than answering the man directly, he's speaking only to him, Jesus broadens the



interest of his teaching to speak to the entire crowd. They all need to hear what Jesus has to say here. And folks, so do we. We need to hear this too.

Listen, the age of, if I can just pick on us a little bit, the age of modern media, its mass communication technologies, listen, they've proliferated content, haven't they? Content is everywhere, both good and bad. Righteous and unrighteous content is all over the Internet and the airwaves and all this content has become so easily accessible and in many cases unrestricted. Totally available and absolutely free.

So the fact of modern media in our world today that we live with, it's both a blessing and a curse, isn't it? Some cases we take good advantage of the access we have to good things, learn, be instructed, encouraged. In other cases, need to be very careful, don't we? Always on guard for ourselves always in guard for our families.

But I think a more subtle danger that lurks in the presence of all the availability of this content, even good and wholesome content, the subtle danger is the distraction factor. One of the sins that dominates our world today is what the Apostle John describes as the lust of the eyes. This covetous desire to feed our eyes and our brains with new and interesting stuff.

It's like the Athenian philosophers always talking about and debating about something new. We call it news. Some of it fake news. Our minds can become so easily distracted with useless content, with irrelevant content. Irrelevant information pointless for us to know our curiosities take us away from daily responsibilities. So we could see what's going on all over the world. So eyes are up looking at the horizons, not down looking at the pathway for our feet.

The real issues we face every day, the things that really matter. The responsibilities of our stewardship, responsibility to our homes, our jobs, our church. Stewardships in our neighborhood, our local communities. Because of this constant stream of media, our minds could be taken far away from here and

taken over there, preoccupied, preoccupied not by things of righteousness and wisdom here, but by things happening thousands of miles away that don't pertain to us.

Solomon warned us about this several millennia before the Internet age. Proverbs 17:24, "the discerning sets his face toward wisdom, but the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth." Other translations say a fool's eyes roam or even run to the ends of the earth. Why? Because a fool shirks responsibility.

Because a fool doesn't wanna be held down, nailed down, confined, constrained to what wisdom demands. Which is change in his life, right here, right now. But those who are discerning, perceptive, those concerned about wisdom, they keep their eyes focused straight ahead because wisdom is about the righteous application of knowledge to daily life here and now in order to please and glorify God.

So that's the problem with this guy's question. It maintains a very safe distance between himself and his duty to make any personal change. It's a safe distance between himself and his duty to exercise personal responsibility. Because of what Jesus has taught.

So Jesus, as I said, he doesn't address his reply to this questioner in particular, but rather he broadens it out. He repurposes the man's question, answering in a way that puts the question to use for better ends, for his own purposes. So Jesus would have this man. Have this entire crowd, all of us as well. He'd have us less concerned about satisfying intellectual academic curiosities. Instead, we're to direct our attention and our energy and our concern toward the state of our souls.

End of verse 23, Jesus said to them, to the whole crowd, this takes us to point number three, which is the thesis. Point number three, the thesis, a message of immediate relevancy. This isn't about idle curiosity. This isn't counting the number of angels that dance on the head of a pin. This is a message of immediate concern. Immediate relevancy to your life now.

He said to them in verse 24, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." Tremendously important verse. So we're going to walk through the elements of Jesus thesis here today. Slowly, carefully, make sure we don't misunderstand this, and I'll list out the points, first, second, third, and you can write those things down, one, two, three.

First, let's consider the word strive. First, the word strive. It's a verb strive, it's *agonizomai*, and you can hear in that verb *agonizomai*, you can hear the English words agonize or the noun agony. And that's right for you to think that way. That's the main idea in that verb.

That verb *agonizomai*, it means to be engaged in a struggle. It comes from the public games where it literally meant to engage in a contest, to contend for a prize. All those who enter the arena, before they ever get there, to the arena, they have sacrificed everything. Many years of grueling training. No pain, no gain, right? They have come to win. They pay that cost. So

that they can overcome in a public contest where there is only one winner. Only one person comes out of that arena crowned.

They compete to be that one. You can think about all the effort, and energy, and striving, and agony, that goes into that. Athletes get this. Soldiers get this, training hard, putting in the hours, paying the cost, training to win. It requires sustained effort over a long period of time, pain, and cost, and energy, and suffering.

When you go out to battle, you hold nothing back. When you go out to compete in the arena, you hold nothing back. You leave everything out there on the field. You leave no questions because it is do or die. All that concept, that thought, we've seen that, we have a country that is saturated with sports, don't we?

It's all contained in that verb *agonizomai*. To strive, earnestly make every effort, strain at every nerve. So this is strenuous, it's costly, it's painful. One man wrote, "The goal

can only be reached with the full expenditure of all our energies." He also says, "The struggle for the Kingdom of Heaven allows no indolence." Another word for laziness. No indecision or relaxation. Only those who press into it attain entrance.

So with that in mind, here's a second point, number two. Take note that this is an example of Jesus evangelizing here. This is, this is how Jesus did evangelism. He gave the message, the good news of the Gospel, he told him about a holy God, their sinfulness, himself as an atoning sacrifice, he didn't leave it there. In his Gospel preaching, he pressed them toward a decision, he called for a decision to make a change, to repent and believe.

He doesn't say things in his evangelism like we hear today. Hey, getting saved is really, really easy. Just pray this prayer with me. He doesn't say, Man, I really, really want a relationship with you. Just, been thinking about it in Heaven for a long time. You're on my mind. And I've come to Earth, just to ask you, will you please accept me? Please accept me. Just repeat this simple mantra for the rest of your life and never

doubt it. Jesus died for my sins. You'll be good to go. That's your ironclad guarantee. You're going to Heaven. You're one of mine.

We don't see anything like that. Many evangelistic things that are taught and strategies and little scripts. Try to compare that with Scripture. You see so much Scripture taken out of context. You see the, the real thrust and demands of the Gospel distorted to unrecognition. Look at verse 25. How Jesus is driving home the message of the Kingdom of God by showing what happens to those who don't accept the gracious invitation of the king.

Jesus there is pictured as the master of the house. He sent invitations all over the place to join his banquet. Many of them ignore his invitation. But many others have come, verse 29. There comes a point though, when he gets up, shuts the door, the banquet begins. The party starts.

And when those who come late and they stand outside and appeal and plead, he answers them with cool indifference. I don't know where you come from. When they appeal and make an argument in verse 26, his indifference turns into total disdain there in verse 27, "I tell you I don't know where you come from. Depart from me all you workers of evil." In other words, we have nothing to do with one another, you and me. Get your evil self away from me, is what he's saying. Very strong language.

Listen, beloved, when we evangelize, we need to present Jesus for who he really is. He is not some squishy mournful schmuck who comes down and says, pleads with people, to accept him, as if he's got a self-esteem problem. Jesus is a great king. And he makes a gracious offer and he points us to an open door.

Those who see who he is, what he offers, they don't care that the doorway is narrow. Anything that constricts them as they enter into that, and it hurts them, Oh, it's far better than what they've come from. Because they've learned to hate



their sin. They've come to be sad and sorrowful over everything that they've been living through.

They want nothing to do with themselves anymore. Narrow, I don't care if I could squeeze through it. Camel through an eye of a needle? I'll follow that camel, I'll get in. The door is open now. He's inviting. So those who reject the invitation to enter through the door that he's so graciously opened, he's going to reject them. Makes sense, listen once that door is shut, there's no opening it again.

So we're gonna ask a third question, third. Is Jesus teaching works salvation here? I mean, I thought salvation was free. Free offer? Um, can I just cash in the coupon? Uh, agonize, strive, pain? If Jesus is teaching works salvation here, then in this one instance he would be contradicting himself and the rest of the entirety of Scripture.

So no, he's not teaching works salvation. Let's make that clear. Nothing Jesus says here or anywhere else in his teaching

contradicts the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. In fact, those reformation distinctives that we speak of all the time and the solas, those, those come from him, they come from his apostles.

Those who strive to enter the narrow door are those to whom God has been gracious. Those to whom God has granted his saving, regenerating grace. So it's the grace of God alone that is the single, necessary factor, in the salvation of any one sinner. And to all whom God gives his saving, regenerating grace, they will come through that narrow door, which is open to them.

Those who strive and are striving to enter through the narrow door or those who come by faith and by faith alone. Not by works, not by their own human efforts. Nothing generated within them. Even their faith isn't generated within them, right? That's the clear teaching of Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "for by grace you have been saved through faith and this," that demonstrative pronoun pointing right back to "by grace you have been saved through faith," this salvation by grace through faith is not your own doing, "it's the gift of God."

Even the faith to believe is not your own doing. You exercise it, but is not your own doing. "It's not the result of works, so that no one may boast." You don't boast in your works. You don't boast in your prayer. You don't boast in your baptism. You don't boast in your church attendance. You don't boast in even your faith. It's given to you. To strive, agonize, make every effort strain every nerve and all the rest. No one does that apart from believing.

But all that agony, effort, energy, and strain, by believing that that is worth it, for all who believe the word, the one who said "strive to enter through the narrow door," you know what they do? They gladly strive to enter. They eagerly joyfully, gratefully endure whatever agony is required.

That opened door is an escape from eternal death. That open door is their salvation from their sin that they've been saturated with. That open door is the means and the entrance into gladness and joy and no more sorrow and suffering over all their sin. So they run through it.

Those who strive to enter the narrow door are those who see the door as God's salvation because they see, with eyes of faith having been born again by the Spirit of God, they see the door as God's salvation because Jesus Christ himself is the door.

Jesus said, John 9, 10:9, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me he'll be saved, he'll go in and out and find pasture rest."

Cool, comfort. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life," John, 14:6, "and no one comes to the Father except through me." There's that narrow door. Salvation is exclusive to Jesus Christ.

Come to salvation in and through Jesus Christ and him alone. It's a constrictive way, isn't it? You don't come in defining Jesus like a Playdough man into whoever you want him to be. Oh my Jesus would never condemn homosexuality. Oh, my Jesus accepts all kinds of people. You bigoted Christian.

Well, whatever your Jesus is, not this Jesus, not the door. This exclusivity of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, this is the narrow door, and it turns so



many people away. Those who strive to enter will enter. Only those will enter who strive.

By entering, they demonstrate that they've been granted eternal life from God. So those who strive are those who believe, and those who believe are those who've been born again by this gracious initiative of a sovereign God. No one enters by striving with mere human effort, doing works according to the flesh. The striving that Jesus describes here is the product of a regenerate heart. A person who believes and obeys.

So Jesus said in John thirt, three, John 3:5, "Truly, truly, I say to you," he said this to Nicodemus, "unless one is born of water and the spirit," unless one is born by forgiveness of sins and the baptism of the Spirit, can't enter the Kingdom of God. No entrance. All who are born again, born of God, they strive to enter, and they do enter. No, works salvation here.

So we understand the word strive. We see Jesus is evangelizing, we recognize he's not promoting works salvation,

but instead a Spirit generated striving. So number four, why the need? Why do we need to strive? Why does it require such agony to enter through this door? Well, because Jesus said the, the, the door is narrow, didn't he? *Stenos*, it means constricted, tight, really hard to squeeze yourself through it.

Like me fitting into old suits, kind of like that. To get through such a narrow, constricted space you gotta leave your sin behind. You gotta give up any claims you think you may have on God's favor. Any privilege you think is yours by your upbringing, your nationality, your church background, your church affiliation, the parents who raised you, any spiritual heritage, family connections, all that's gotta go.

It's a narrow door. So narrow that even these intangible things of our lives like goals and ambitions and dreams and desires, all of it gets cut away at that door. Jesus said, Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me," what did he say, "let him deny," what, "himself take up his cross daily, follow me. For whoever would save his life, will lose it, whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

So this strain, exertion, painful effort, it's driven by a faith that produces sustained, lifelong self-denial. And for the Jews to whom Jesus spoke, it meant they had to fight against the cultural sense of false security that they've been raised with. The assurance they received from their parents, and their rabbis, and all their respected teachers. Their struggle was against the predominant, powerful, social pressure of a religious establishment, centuries of tradition. Rabbinical teaching, social pressure from family and friends. Listen. Is that all that different from us?

For Americans, this means we have to fight against the deception of a false assurance that we have been raised with. All those inappropriate promises we heard from, maybe, well meaning parents and grandparents, and well meaning pastors, respected teachers who told us, you prayed the prayer, so don't ever question that again. You said Jesus is your savior, so don't ever question that again. It's the devil who wants to tempt you to doubt your salvation. Once saved, always saved, you're good to go.

Oh yeah, we've got traditions of our own. Believe me, evangelicals have, have built centuries of tradition too. It's all based on false, distorted, perverted, twisted, and it's become sub-Christian gospel, not true gospel. So we too need to strain against all those traditions, even if it means upsetting grandma. Even if it means we gotta tell Mom, Look that prayer I prayed when I was four, I don't think it really meant anything. I don't think I really understood. Because my life between like 7, or 10, and 32 is just filled with sin. Don't you see that? It's not what a regenerate heart does. Mom, I'm sorry, but I really need don't mean to upset you, but I really need to be saved. Isn't it better, that I really find true salvation and eternal life by questioning all this stuff, than just by making you feel good, that you did a good job as a mom, raising me in AWANA? Oh yeah, we got traditions. Much of it based on sentimentality.

Fifth point, just wrapping up here. Fifth point is, ask this question, is striving the duty of the unsaved only or is there a sense in which believers need to strive? I'm just gonna answer that question because of the way I set up the question

you know my answer. Believers need to strive. What does it say there, Jesus said *agonizomai*, and he put it into the present tense. Be continually striving.

Habitually strive to enter. Keep on striving, agonizing, straining, exerting. Make it your habit, your lifestyle to struggle, strain, striving to enter, and you say, well, can I have no assurance about my salvation then? Absolutely you can, because your assurance of your salvation comes from something completely objective. Having nothing to do with you. It has to do with the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

But you know what will strengthen your assurance when you see in yourself this heart of striving, of, longing, of desiring, of putting off sin, and putting on righteousness that strengthens your assurance. You know what will dull your assurance and remove it? It should, if you're a true Christian. When you see yourself addicted to ease. When you see yourself, settling into comfort and you really resent people challenging you.



It may seem like salvation sounds like a lot of work. Think about the apostle Paul, we read earlier from Philippians chapter 3. He talked about straining, didn't he? He uses the same word *agonizomai*, in describing his entire approach to ministry life, Colossians 1:29, "For this I toil, struggling," there's that word *agonizomai*, "struggling," but with this, "all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Christians understand that. There is a struggle. Yeah, there's strain and toil and tiring labor. Our sin is always trying to pull us back, and hold us down, and distract us, and tempt us, and pull us away. But here's the secret. We don't just have our own power, which is useless to fight that battle. The secret of the Christian life is it's not your fleshly energy that's fighting the fight, it's the power of Christ in us.

Philippians 2:13 there, 12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." He said, oh, no, salvation by works. It's gonna be hard. No, no, "it's God who works in you, both to will," there at the hard level, there at the regeneration level, "it's God who works in you, both to will and to do the work for

his good pleasure." Paul applied this to himself. Personally, throughout his entire life, his entire ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:24, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it." One prize, one winner. That's the one who enters through the narrow door. The one who's striving to enter, straining every muscle, putting out on race day and every day before that, and every day.

He goes on and says, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath that we an imperishable. So I don't run aimlessly, I don't box as one, beating the air. I discipline my body. I make it my slave. So that after preaching to others, I, myself will not be disqualified."

Disqualified? Is he, is he mourning the loss of a trophy to put on the shelf? He's concerned about being disqualified from the race. Disqualified from the match, kicked out of the



contest. So he's exercising self-discipline. He's training himself for godliness. He keeps on straining, striving, pursuing the prize.

Beloved, that's the Christian life. It's one marked by striving against sin, straining against the desires of the flesh, struggling to break free and resist temptations, fighting to win, turning away from the world and all of its distractions. We don't do it from our own initiative. It's not our own will. It's God who works in us. He's been gracious to us, his sovereign initiative. We don't generate this effort from ourselves.

The power of the Spirit, it is in us to work and strive by faith. You don't do it in your own strength. We do it in the resurrected power of Christ. Strength of our Savior who's our ever present Lord. And listen, we often don't really, really refer to it as striving or straining, do we? What do we call it? Blessed rest.

GRACE CHURCH



Father, thank you for this invitation to enter through the narrow door. To come in to blessed rest. To accept this gracious offer from our Lord who says strive to enter through the narrow door. Father, we pray that by your Spirit you would work in the hearts of those who do not yet know you. There may be people who've been sitting here for decades. Who've been thinking that they are just fine that they're saved, but they have really embraced a false gospel. And they've been trying to protect themselves by returning to false reasons for assurance.

Oh Father, I pray that by your grace and kindness you would just blow that up today. That in reflecting on what Jesus is teaching here. Those who do not yet know you would far, for the first time come to know you, by your grace through faith. Coming through the narrow door. The exclusive salvation in Christ and Christ alone. We love you and thank you for the opportunity we have to rejoice today in celebrating and the rest that we have in Jesus Christ by coming to the Lord's table. So I pray that you'd be working in every heart and let us come with joy, because Christ is our rest. He's our full satisfaction. He is our salvation. In his name, we pray. Amen.