

*Entrance to the kingdom of God is yours through Jesus, the narrow door. Amen.*

**"Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (13:23).** You wonder sometimes. When you look at the world around you and think about all the people who ever lived, you have to wonder: How full is heaven going to be? Of the seven billion plus people alive right now, how many are going to heaven?

It's a good question. It's also a controversial question – people don't like the Bible's answer. Plus, it is a really old question.

**Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem (13:22).** It's two millennia ago, and Jesus is making his final trip to Jerusalem with frequent stops along the way. Not because he's afraid of the cross, but because every stop is another opportunity to teach.

During one of these stops **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" (13:23-24).**

Jesus does not answer the question because there's a more important one. What difference does it make, how many people get in? The real question is, "Will you be one of them?" Jesus says that many people are expecting to walk right in, but they will be locked out.

What's the problem, that they try to enter but they can't? They're using the wrong door. You can't get into Walmart through the door that says McDonald's, and you can't get into heaven through a door that doesn't open there. There's only one door to eternal life, and it is narrow.

Not because God hides it from you or because it requires a secret handshake to get in. It's narrow because your sinful nature wants nothing to do with it. "The sinful mind is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7). Your sinful nature wants you to find your own way, win your own prize, be the master of your own universe.

That's why Jesus says, **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door" (13:24).** The Greek word translated "make every effort" gives us the English word "agonize." Agonize to enter through the narrow door.

Because there's no coasting into heaven. There is daily struggle. Jesus once said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The sin inside you and Satan and the world around you are all working against your entering through that narrow door.

So what is the narrow door? Or, better, *who* is the narrow door? Jesus is. He is the only way to heaven: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9). "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Contrary to popular opinion, there are not many different doors to heaven. One religion is not just as good as another; they are not just different faces of the same God. There is only one true God who sent his one true Son to fulfill the one true plan of salvation for all people (John 3:16-18).

Maybe you're thinking of Muslims, Mormons, Hindus, and unbelievers. As hard as they try and as noble as their efforts are, hell is on the other side of their door. Or maybe you're thinking of your kids, your parents, your friends whose faith in Jesus is gone or fading. Hell is on the other side of that door too.

It's important for us to think about others whenever we are confronted with the reality of hell, but that's not Jesus' point here. He doesn't say "they" or "them." He says "you." He wants you to think about yourself.

**"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" (13:25-28).**

Jesus' audience assumes that they will stroll right into heaven. They're Israelites! They have every advantage imaginable (Romans 9:1-9)! But all their advantages won't do them a lick of good if they do not trust in the Savior those advantages point to.

So they say, "Sir, open the door for us." "I don't know you or where you come from." "We ate and drank with you, we saw your glory, received your law, worshiped in your temple!" "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!"

And if it happened to them, it can happen to you.

You die. Your body and soul separate. Your family puts your body in the dirt, to turn back into dirt. Your God takes your soul and places it before himself. Behind him is the narrow door.

You see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets, Grandpa Willie, Grandma Rachel and all the rest of the faithful in the kingdom of God. God sees you eyeing the heavenly feast. So he asks, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" How will you answer? Well, what are your options?

You know that you're not perfect. Still, you are pretty good. Of course, you don't like to hear it when God calls you out on your sin, and he probably doesn't appreciate that.

You were adopted as God's child in Holy Baptism and then confirmed in that faith. But you think about that so infrequently that God won't be impressed by it. Lord knows you aren't.

You see the divine glory in Holy Communion, concealed in the bread and the wine. But you see it so often that it's not special anymore. Actually it's kind of a pain because Communion Services last so long.

You are a steward of the Old and New Testaments, the fullness of God's revelation, collected in one convenient book we call The Bible. But other than an hour, maybe an hour fifteen in church you don't set aside much time for that Word. Can't go that route either.

You attend a Lutheran church with a Lutheran Elementary School that claims to praise Jesus and teach his Word to all. But can anyone tell that from the way you behave Monday through Saturday?

"Sir, open the door for us. I ate and drank at your altar, I owned four Bibles, I sent my kids to Sunday School, I was a member of Saint John's Lutheran Church!"

All of them, good gifts from God. All of them, things we neglect. All of them, the wrong answer. And if we really cherished any of those advantages, we wouldn't struggle to answer a simple question: "Why should I let you into my heaven?"

Jesus is the narrow door. This is all about Jesus. **Enter through the narrow door.** That is the answer: Jesus, who makes every effort to be your narrow door to eternal life. He actually takes on human flesh and lives thirty-three years of sin free perfection – perfection that he gives to you!

Remember where Jesus is going when he says all this. He is going to hell. He is making his way to Jerusalem one last time. He marches to the cross and hangs himself where you belong. The Father sees his one and only Son in agony on the cross and says, "**I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me!**" (13:27). Jesus begs, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

But he doesn't avoid that agony; he embraces it. He is thrown out from his Father so that you will not be, and he rises from death so that you will never hear God say, "**I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me!**" (13:27). He already said it to Jesus. Jesus is your narrow door. "Why should I let you into my heaven?" Because Jesus lived for me, Jesus died for me, Jesus rose for me!

And yes, Jesus warns that the door to heaven is narrow, but he also promises that it is open to everyone: "**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" (13:29-30).**

The door is narrow, but people from all over the world will enter it. Why? Because God so loved the world that Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose for everyone in the world.

Many will enter from east and west and north and south. Not because everyone is automatically saved, but because Christ is the Savior of everyone. "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The narrow door of heaven opens only for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

**"Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (13:23);** it's a good question. But the better question is, "Am I going to be one of them?" Your answer is found not in all the great things you have done or in all the great advantages you have, but only at the narrow door, the Savior who says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Amen.