

“Struggle To Enter Through The Narrow Door”

(Luke 13:22-30)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Luke 13:24: **“[Jesus said] Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”** And from Luke 13:30: **“And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”** In speaking of these words from Luke 13, Luther remarked: *“It is to frighten the greatest saints (Buls, Exegetical Notes, Series C Luke-John, 46).”* Evidently, God clearly intends to frighten! Now this seems counter-intuitive to the Gospel and frankly contradictory to other parts of Scripture. For example in 1st John 4:18: **“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”** Who could blame you if you’re now just a little confused? Here’s the summary so far:

1. Jesus taught that many people will not be able to enter through the narrow door for salvation. That’s scary!
2. Jesus also taught that those who are “first” – people who should be in the perfect position to have eternal life and salvation – will not be saved and will be treated as “last.” Again, scary!
3. Luther says that these Scriptures are designed “to frighten the greatest saints.”
4. However, 1st John 4:18 speaks of God casting out fear. Consider also such passages as Romans 8:1 teaching that there is now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus! Furthermore, Jesus tenderly and compassionately calls you to Himself: **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).”** How can it be said that Jesus wants you to be afraid?!
5. But these two biblical ideas remain and both are true:
 - A. God **wants** you to be afraid AND
 - B. God does **not** want you to be afraid.

Not only does this seem to contradict basic logic, but it doesn’t settle well in our souls.

My daddy was so loving that I knew I always had access to him. And as a little boy I was bold to climb on him when he sprawled out on the living room floor; or hold onto his arm hanging over the sofa; or playing “barber shop” with his hair when he came home from work (he seemed to enjoy my spraying a little water into his hair as I combed it back...I think he found it relaxing). In all of these scenarios, I simply never feared my daddy. Love had cast out all fear.

But there were entirely different instances when I did what I should not have done. One time, he disciplined me after I tried to put back into place that which I had no permission to use. He saw the evidence and called me to come outside. I'll never forget, I came out a little nervous thinking, "How could he possibly know what I did?!" But this was my dad; he had his way. Traci has told our kids that she has eyes at the back of her head...and sometimes I think it is true! God definitely helps parents be parents!

Well, my dad called me out and said, "So, do you want to tell me about your little escapade?" And I said – in all truth and sincerity – "what's an *escapade*?" My ex-Marine dad half-grinned (sort of) while making it clear that he was not pleased – even as I knew I was busted – and told me to go back inside, get a dictionary, look up "escapade," and then come back out. It was an ingenious move, because it prolonged my trepidation. I was having one of those experiences I never wanted to have again. And I look back and I realize that in that instance I was afraid.

In that particular instance, under those unique circumstances, I think he *wanted me* to be afraid.

So, my dad did *not* want me to be afraid and he *did* want me to be afraid. It all depended on the circumstances in my relationship with him, and he was an awesome dad!

Similarly, we need to understand the circumstances of Luke 13. Jesus was – so to speak – addressing a very dangerous spiritual escapade that sinners play around with.

Let me explain: our Gospel in Luke 13 begins with the words, "[Jesus] went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem (v 22)." We can't lay enough emphasis on the simple description: "journeying toward Jerusalem." Our Lord Jesus had a pin-point purpose for coming; for journeying toward Jerusalem. He came to save you from sin, death, and the power of Satan. He came to save you to eternal life, for entrance into the kingdom of God, and overflowing love and joy. In other words, Jesus came for you to personally – again to *personally* – know this salvation. And all of this would be accomplished in *Jerusalem!*

But then there was a question as recorded at Luke 13:23: "**Lord, will those who are saved be few?**" This was a bad question. I know we've all heard the saying, "there is no such thing as a bad question." Well, that's not true. There *are* bad questions. This was one. Jesus was utterly focused on His mission to *personally* save, *but* the person who asked this question was not asking out of personal, self-applied concern, but was asking a theoretical question that avoided personal involvement.

The question was asked from the perspective of the third person: "Will only some be saved? Like some of these or some of those or some of them?" The person was completely detached from the question. He or she was a by-stander. Jesus was like a parade passing through; a fascinating person who represented the opportunity for fulfilling one's curiosity ("let's go see the miracle-worker" or something to that effect); a fun escapade perhaps, but there was no personal investment. This was a question of trivia. Religion was a category on *Jeopardy*. For \$1000.00 the answer is "Not many!" Question: "Who will be saved?"

Such questions are not personal faith questions. This was an academic question that missed that Jesus had come not for the theoretical masses, but for ME!

We relate to this person who asked the question. How often have we treated divine service, prayer, Bible Study, witnessing, and serving in the Kingdom of God, sharing forgiveness, and living in the fruit of the spirit, especially love -- esp. towards those who do not love us -- as theoretical things, academic things; things that we talk about and may even say are important, but they are things that we are not really personally involved in?

And I am not talking about being in close physical proximity to these things. Just because you are in close physical proximity doesn't mean that you are personally involved. It is possible to be in a conversation with another person and for that person you are talking to (or perhaps even yourself) to be there, but at the same time, to be far, far away. A person might be standing right there, but in their mind they're a thousand miles away!

This is the way we are in our sin. The Lord comes to us in His Word, but our hearts are far away. The Lord proclaims His Word, but our minds are somewhere else. He comes to us in His body and blood, and we more focused on how the wine tastes today. This is when Jesus is not personally urgent. This is when we treat our sin as nothing, and when we treat faith as a mere formality and divine service as a religious exercise. Our faith becomes theoretical and we treat our Savior in a third-person type of way as if He came for everyone else, but not for you.

Dear Christians, this is when our loving Savior *must* frighten us, because if He doesn't, we will die in our sins and be condemned. Thank God that in the greatest love, He also came to frighten us when we are acting this way.

So to that "third-person"/theoretical escapade-loving sinner, Jesus says, "***Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able (Luke 13:24).***" The word "strive" here is also translated as "struggle." Struggle to enter through the

narrow door. And the “narrow door” is a metaphor for Jesus Christ. So Jesus is telling you and me to wake up and struggle, struggle, struggle to fight the good fight of faith with all your might, run with endurance, cry out to God, resist the flesh, crucify your old man so that it will be all about knowing how much you need Jesus, your Door to eternal life.

Jesus is not telling you to be a better moral person. He’s not saying to polish up your act. He’s saying recognize the work of God that is a messy work as it kills your old Adam, your sinful flesh on a daily basis and leads you to live in repentance which treats rising up in personal faith as extremely serious and necessary. The work of God includes realizing that Christ came for *you* and as His Word and Sacrament comes to *you* again: it is to be taken *personally and urgently and joyfully...* “*given and shed for YOU for the forgiveness of sins!*” So long theoretical Christianity!

This is the Lord’s gracious work in and through which He most certainly casts out all fear. When you see Jesus coming to you (as you will again in just a few minutes when you receive Holy Communion), you will know that because He comes to you personally, all fear is gone. The narrow door is no longer hard to find, because Jesus comes to you, finds you and gives Himself to you. The Way, the Truth, and the Life gives you Himself, so we don’t have to worry about the fact that He is the *narrow* door, because for us who are being saved Jesus is the *only* door and He draws you to Himself through His Word as you confess to Him, “You came for me! You came for ME! YOU CAME FOR ME!” Your baptism proves it! Your eating of His body and your drinking of His blood guarantees it!

Now those who were last like you and me living in a theoretical, third-person, so-called “faith,” have died to sin through Christ who died with your sin on Him! And put you – you *personally* – into His death for you in Holy Baptism. The theoretical Christian has died. The third-person Christian is gone. Now the last is made first, because the risen Jesus has made you alive again. Such a faith knows a sanctified selfishness: we cry “Hosanna!” ... “Lord save ME now! Save me! Save ME! *This* poor sinner right here!” And Jesus tells you, “***Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 13:32).***”