

## FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Sermon Text: Luke 13:23-30

*"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last."* (KJV)

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

Today we live in a society that presumes to instruct us and our children to be tolerant and accepting of all religions. The World insists we accept its lie, claiming that whether he is called Buddha, Mohammed, or Jesus Christ, or by any other name, everyone is worshipping the same God. They say He is simply known by different names to different people.

According to the world's philosophy, the Jews, who reject the innocent suffering and bitter death of Jesus Christ, will be received into heaven on account of the Covenant God made with Abraham and by the strict keeping of the mosaic Law.

It is said the Catholic, too, will go to Heaven based upon his good works, ritual penance for sin confessed before a priest and the timely purchase of reprieve from purgatory, where they claim, one must wait in a kind of "limbo" until such time as full monetary restitution of the deceased's unconfessed sin is made by those left here on earth.

Others, claiming to be Christians, make a great outward show of a commitment to a moral way of life, and, indeed, make frequent use of the name of Jesus Christ in popular catch-phrases, while at the same time falsely laying claim to some imagined inherent goodness within themselves.

In their sinful humanistic philosophy, these believe such imagined basic goodness within themselves, along with all the good works they perform, merit them heaven, or at least allows them to claim they "cooperate" with God in the working out of their own salvation, thereby earning for themselves a place in Heaven.

To make matters worse, many of today's politically correct, touchy-feelie, pseudo-religious leaders claim that even the staunchest Atheist, he who rejects the very existence of God, he who shuts his ears to the Word of God, and quiets his conscience, refusing to believe the guilty weight and burden of sin upon his soul, will escape also punishment in Hell.

These supposedly "loving" pastors adamantly declare that God is not so unloving as to condemn anyone to the torments of Hell, after all, they say, God hates sin, not the sinner."

And so the claim is made that *everyone* will go to Heaven, regardless of the path their particular religion lays before them.

We often hear people say: "As long as you believe in something, live a good life and don't purposely hurt anyone, you will go to heaven."

But such lying and vain philosophies of men do nothing, but the Devil's work.

For, as Jesus told His disciple, Thomas, so He tells the whole world,  
*"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."*  
 (John 14:6)

We also read in Acts 4:12: (Speaking of Jesus Christ)  
*"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."*

Dear Ones, Those who claim salvation can be found in any other than Christ are not only guilty of comforting the unrepentant sinner in his sin and the unbeliever in his unbelief, but they mock and despise the very precious blood of Jesus Christ shed upon the cross.

In foolish arrogance they declare the Almighty to be but a liar and that Jesus Christ was simply a man who was at best either a scoundrel and a charlatan, or at worse, insane.

And should they remain unrepentant of their sin, these false teachers secure for themselves not an eternity of bliss, but an eternity in the unceasing torments of hell.

So then, as the question is posed to Our Lord Jesus in our text, "*Are only a few people saved?*"

As our text reads, Jesus responded to the question put to Him, first with an admonition, (For shouldn't one who is seriously concerned about his salvation *first* search out how a person is saved?) and then He gives a perhaps most unexpected answer to the question asked.

Jesus first says, "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*" (This can be rightly understood as, "Strive to enter through the narrow door.")

Now, you might ask, How do I strive to enter through the narrow door?

Have you ever been so overloaded with such a bulky and heavy load of stuff to carry into the house that you find you can't go through the doorway? No matter how you twist and turn, no matter how hard you try, the load you are carrying is too heavy and too wide for you to manage your way through such a relatively narrow opening.

Such is always the case with natural man. On account of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, every man, every woman, and every little boy and girl ever born, carries a most wide and heavy load of sin and guilt upon their soul.

And the load gets only wider and heavier as sinful man adds to the already heavy load of damning Original Sin and Guilt, the sins he commits every day and the good works he falsely believes will make him deserving of a place in heaven.

So heavy and bulky, in fact, is this load of sin, guilt, and vain confidence in good works, that no matter how long or how hard he tries, as long as he carries it with him, he can't get in through the narrow door into the House of the Master.

Dear Ones, Let us take a moment to honestly examine ourselves...

Have we allowed something or someone to become more important than God and His Holy Word in our life? Have we allowed anything to interfere with our daily prayer and worship of God?

Have we misused the name of God in our thoughts and words this day?

Have we faithfully obeyed all those whom God has placed in authority over us?

Have we wished evil upon our neighbor and taken pleasure when evil befell him? Or have we sought only to help and defend him?

Have we turned away and fled every temptation of sexual sin?

Have we spoken ill of, or been a gossip or false witness against our neighbor?

Have we so deeply desired that which belongs to another that we worked to think of some way we could deprive him of that with which God has blessed him?

What load of sin and guilt are YOU carrying?

Know this from the Word of God,

*"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness. Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."* (Galatians 5:19-21)

Do you believe you deserve heaven based upon your attempts to please God with good works?

Have you privately convinced yourself that you might somehow merit or earn the good Grace of God and Eternal Life in heaven by the amount of money or time you give to church or by performing other good deeds?

Know this from God's Holy Word,

*"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* (Romans 3:19-20)

So, we see that the person who continues to carry the heavy burden of sin will never gain entry into heaven. Nor will all the good works a man could perform in this world enable anyone to enter into the kingdom of God.

Rather, the weight of sin condemns natural man to eternal punishment and all his good works are but as filthy rags and a stumbling block and hindrance to his salvation.

Dear Ones, the time is short. For, as our text, tells us, soon the Master of the House will get up and close the door.

Those unable to enter through the narrow door on account of the awful load of unrepentant sin, guilt, and all attempts to earn heaven they yet carry, will be left, outside.

Left ...with their awful burden of sin and meaningless good works.

Left... but to knock in panic and plead in vain for the door to be opened but once more to them.

These, the Master of the House will deny knowing, *because* of their rejection of Jesus Christ, *because of their unbelief*.

And it will be the same, (and worse) for those who knowingly teach anything contrary to the Word of God.

The Master will deny knowing these, as well, regardless of their loud claims of having outwardly served Him here on earth. As we read in Matthew 7: 21-23:

*“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

Within their hearts and as an outward show, they made a pretense of serving God. Through their willing denial and subversion of the Truth, they deceived the hearts of the simple in the faith with their fine words and fair speeches, and so did the work of their father, the Devil.

All who remain unrepentant in their sins against God and man, those who reject the narrow door to heaven, the Lord of Heaven shall deny knowing and shall rightly and justly condemn them all to an eternity of punishment in the unquenchable fires of Hell.

*Where will YOU be at the last day?*

Inside, having entered through the narrow door into the Kingdom of Heaven... there celebrating a great wedding feast with the Master of the House, or left outside in utter darkness, where there will be the terrible wailing and gnashing of teeth?

Dear Ones, The God-Man Christ Jesus is the Only Answer to the load of sin and guilt each, and every one of us carries.

NO ONE can enter the narrow door to heaven with such a burden. And so purely out of His Divine Mercy, without any merit or worthiness on our part, God made a plan.

Before the very foundation of the earth, He planned for your personal salvation in the life and death of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

In Galatians 4:4-7 we read,

*“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”*

And so God draws us to Himself with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

He tells us to lay down our heavy burden of sin and guilt at the foot of the cross and to receive, with glad thanksgiving, the free gift of the forgiveness of all our sins, life and salvation in Christ Alone.

For Jesus **alone** as true God and true man was able to keep the Law of God perfectly in our stead.

Jesus **alone** as true God and true man bore your sins and mine ...yea, the sins of the whole world ... in His body. He paid **in full**, once and for all people, the entire debt of this world's sin when He suffered and died on the cross, so that we might have true peace, reconciliation with God, and the inheritance of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven as His dear children.

Dear Children of God, Rejoice! And again, I say rejoice!

For our loving Savior, Jesus Christ was raised of God the Father for our justification!

We are no longer encumbered with the weight of sin and death! Our sins are forgiven by merit of the Righteousness of Christ **alone**, freely imputed to us for His sake, *by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone* in Christ Jesus.

We have the complete forgiveness of all our sins and everlasting life in heaven through Christ Jesus!

This **IS** the narrow door to the kingdom of God, where we shall receive, as God's own dear children, crowns of purest gold and robes of richest glory.

Strive, therefore, to keep your faith alive and growing by often receiving pure spiritual food through the hearing and reading of His Holy Word, And do not neglect to avail yourselves of the strengthening and preserving of your faith through the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

For if we who have once received the gift of faith, neglect the spiritual feeding of our souls and the feeding of those precious souls we have been entrusted, we who believed ourselves to be *first* in the kingdom, may find ourselves *last*; or worse yet, outside the door, in utter horror at our folly when at last the Great Day of the Lord's Judgment is at hand.

For the Master's House WILL be filled. Believers in Christ WILL come as our text tells us..."from the east, from the west, from the north and from the south."

That we might be counted among them, let us, therefore, lay firm hold of the forgiveness of our sins and the wonderful free inheritance of life eternal through faith alone in Christ Jesus Our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Not what these hands have done, Can save this guilty soul; Not what this toiling  
flesh has borne, Can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do Can give me peace with God; Not all my prayers and sighs  
and tears Can bear my awe-full load.

Thy work alone, O Christ, Can ease this weight of sin; Thy blood alone, O Lamb of  
God, Can give me peace within,

Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord, to thee, Can rid me of this dark unrest  
And set my spirit free.

Thy grace alone, O God, To me can pardon speak; Thy power alone, O Son of God,  
Can this sore bondage break,

I bless the Christ of God, I rest on Love divine, And with unfaltering lip and  
heart I call this Savior mine.

(TLH 389)

And now, may the peace of God, the love of Christ, and the communion of the Holy  
Spirit, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen