

Luke 13:22-30

Pentecost 11; August 24 & 25, 2025

In the city of Bethlehem stands a great church called the *Church of the Nativity*, built over the site traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus. The original entrance was large—tall enough for a horseman to ride through. Over time, however, the doorway was gradually closed in with stone. First, it was made smaller to keep looters from driving carts inside and leaving with all kinds of relics. Later, it was reduced again to ensure that even the most important guests had to dismount before entering. But when visitors continued bringing their animals inside, the entrance was made smaller still, protecting the church from the damage, noise, and smell.

This small doorway became known as the Door of Humility. It grew so narrow that only one person could pass through at a time, and most had to bow their heads to enter. Stepping through that low, narrow door leads you into a vast and beautiful sanctuary. Though built for practical reasons, the doorway also serves as a striking reminder of the faith required to enter God's kingdom. We do not enter by our works, possessions, or status, but by humbly trusting in Jesus alone. He is the true door.

Jesus says in our text: **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”** What does he mean by this? Let's take a closer look at his words. When Jesus says, **“Make every effort to enter,”** he is not suggesting that we can earn or contribute to our salvation by our own efforts. Scripture makes it clear that salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace. The only way to receive it is through Jesus alone. He is not saying that you need to step up your game to get into heaven. He is not saying that you need to belong to a certain church or be part of a certain race to get into heaven. So, what does he mean by **“make every effort?”** The Greek word that is translated for **“make every effort”** gives us the word to *“agonize.”* Agonize to enter through **“the narrow door.”** There is no coasting into heaven. There is a daily struggle in our Christian faith, isn't there?

Jesus once said: **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”** (Matthew 16:24-25) The sin within us and the attacks of Satan around us are constantly working against our entering the **narrow door**. Following Christ is not easy. Powerful forces in this world—and in our own hearts—try to pull us away from that path. The devil tempts us to give up our life in Christ altogether. At times, being a disciple of Jesus can feel like a real struggle, even agonizing. Yet, Satan cannot take us away from God. Jesus has given us a promise: **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6) There is only 1 way to get into heaven. His name is Jesus.

We don't get into heaven because of what we do. We don't get into heaven because we are part of a select group of people. Jesus says: **“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.’ ‘Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ Many of the Jewish people of Jesus' day believed that they were going to heaven simply because they were Jews, and they tried to keep God's laws as best as they could. After all, they were God's chosen people. They were children of Abraham. *What do you mean that I don't get into heaven because of that? I'm a good person? I've tried as best as I can.* Sound familiar? All roads lead to heaven, don't they? It doesn't really matter what kind of God we believe in?**

A Gallop poll in 2023 found:

*Gallup has documented sharp declines in church attendance, confidence in organized religion and religious identification in recent years. Americans' beliefs regarding God, angels, heaven, hell and the devil have also fallen by double digits since 2001. Still, U.S. adults' belief in each entity remains at the majority level, and regular churchgoers, Protestants and Republicans, in particular, remain largely resolute in their beliefs.*¹

Another poll conducted by the Pew Researched Company in 2023 found that:

¹ https://news.gallup.com/poll/508886/belief-five-spiritual-entities-edges-down-new-lows.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com

A large majority of Americans (79%) believe there is something spiritual beyond the natural world, even if we can't see it. Far fewer (19%) say they believe the natural world is all there is.²

People believe in something. They don't believe in absolute certainties when it comes to heaven and going through the narrow door. Yet, in Jesus, we do have a certainty. Why can we say that? There is only one person who has solved our problem of sin. That someone is Jesus. Imagine if you were talking with your neighbor and he told you that he is going to the moon in a couple of weeks. Then you ask him: *How are you going to do that?* His answer is: *I don't know.* The "how" is kind of important if you were going to the moon. Right? The how we are getting to heaven is kind of important, isn't it? Jesus says the *how* is through him. *I am the way, the truth and the life!*

The question that was asked of Jesus, "**Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?**" was a good question. But the better question is: "*Am I going to be one of them?*" The answer to that question will not be found in all the great things you have done. It is found in Jesus, **the narrow door.** Let us give thanks that through the narrow door of Jesus, "**People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.**" Amen.

² https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-and-spiritual-beliefs/?utm_source=chatgpt.com