

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the thirteenth chapter, beginning at the twenty-second verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³ Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, ²⁴ "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ "When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' ²⁶ "then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' ²⁸ "There will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. ²⁹ "They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ "And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

If you have not been in my office recently, I would invite you come in and see my collection of little people that I have in there. No, they are not actual people, but rather a collection of little Lego guys with different costumes, who occupy space on my bookshelf. Now I bring them up for a very specific purpose: I would argue they are more religious than any one of you here today. I base this on the fact that they hear/listen to my sermon more than anyone in the pews. They sit in a room with more

theological books than you could shake a stick at. They are constantly in a church building, I mean, they are constantly in the pastor's office. They do not argue. They do not complain. They are 'perfect' little people. And yet... they will not be in heaven.

And then there is me and you. We are horrible people: we lie, cheat, steal, murder, and blaspheme. We spend as little time in God's house as is possible. We do not have theological books at our disposal. We bicker, fight, complain... And yet, according to God and His promise, people like you and me will be in heaven. Dear friends, I pray that this sermon today helps you to realize that you have *A Place in the Kingdom of God.*

I would assume that to many of you that introduction seemed a little odd, if not outright silly, but when you really think about it how wrong is it in many people's eyes? According to many in the world today so long as I lead a good enough life that is what will get me into heaven; and I can vouch that the Lego guys

have lived a 'perfect' life so far, although maybe not according to God's standards.

But it is not with God's standards in mind that a man approached Jesus. We are told that as Jesus was traveling a man approached Him and asked, "are there few who are saved?" Note that the man did not ask if he would be saved; rather, he wanted to know if few would be saved. He did not care how to be saved he just wanted to know if a spot might be open later, if he happened to want it.

Well now pastor, how do you know that, can you read his heart? Nope, I can't... but Jesus can. Look at how Jesus responds to the man, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able to." You see, Jesus is not answering the man's question directly, but rather Jesus is pointing out what the man truly needs to know. It is not if few will be able to enter... it is the fact that many will be looking for their on way in. Jesus tells us that many will seek to enter, but we can only get in through the narrow gate. Well pastor that's kind of narrow minded.. and

yes, pun intended, it is narrow-minded. We are a narrow-minded people when it comes to this point. There is no other way into heaven apart from Jesus Christ. Hear what Luther has to say on this point, “Why, for what reason, can they not enter? For that reason that they do not know what the narrow gate is; for that is faith, which makes a person small, yea, altogether nothing, that he must despair of his own works and cling only to God’s grace, forgetting all other things because of that.”

Or as Besser puts it, “Only bent quite low, made utterly small, disrobed of all righteousness of our own, and wholly willing to have the coat of flesh removed from us down to the last rag, can one get through.” These are very graphic depictions of how we are going to get through that narrow gate. It is not through our own works, though boy do we love to lean on those in times of need. If I just try a little bit harder, then I can get in. If I am just a little bit better, then I can get in. If my obedience is just a little bit more than others, then I can get in. But that is not what gets us our spot in the

Kingdom of God. It is the knowledge and faith that it is not dependent upon us.

But that’s not a good feeling is it? I like being the person that you can go to in a high pressure situation. I like being needed and wanted. I like knowing that I can do a good job and that my work is appreciated... but when it comes to heaven, it is not dependent on you.

But I also ask you to not be fooled. There may be a bunch in our midst who say, “Yeah, good point pastor,” and then go home as much a sinner as before. Who come to church to listen and hang out with people but then go home to their life of filth and sin. As Christ notes, people will be knocking on the door and saying, “‘We ate and drank in Your presence and You taught in our streets.’ But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’” And that is a fear that many a pastor has. What if someone from my flock is in church but is not “present”?

The people are pounding on the door telling God “We ate and drank in Your presence and You taught in our streets.” They heard what was going on, but they never latched onto it. They are telling God that they ate in His presence, but notice they did not eat with Him. He taught in their streets but He did not teach them. They may have been there, but were they present? And we too should have a healthy fear of that in our own hearts. Do we come to church for a social gathering or are we coming to hear the very Word of God? Do we come to church to receive the blessings of God or do we come to have coffee and cookies afterward with friends? If we are not being taught by God, if we are not eating and drinking with Him... we are not truly with Him. If we are not living by faith in all that He has done for us, then we are not striving to get through that narrow door.

You see, it is very easy to go through the motions. It is very easy speak a good game. It is very easy to claim the title of Christian... but it is another thing to strive/struggle/fight/claw/scratch/do whatever it takes to make it through the narrow gate. And that is the image that

Christ wants us to take away from this parable: we are to struggle to get through that gate. Imagine that you wanted to be on a sports team but did not want to put in the work: you did not practice, you did not work out, you did nothing to show that you wanted to be on that team... are you truly struggling to make it on the team. Especially if it is your lifelong dream and ambition to be on this team... but you're not willing to do anything about it. And let's be honest, it is a struggle to be faithful to God and His Word. It is a struggle but it is worth it in the end. It is a struggle because we are frail and sinful...

And yet, for us, for us weak, miserable sinners, God sent His Son into our world to redeem us. The Son, Jesus Christ, came into this world to live a perfect life for each and every one of us. He also came so that he could teach the world about Himself and about all that He has done. And when His time on earth had come, He died. he hung on a cross because people did not want to hear the message anymore. They hung Jesus on a cross because they did not want to be faithful followers of Christ and were content

walking away from Him. They hung Jesus on a cross because Jesus had to atone for all our sins and only Jesus could do this. When He died, He was placed in a tomb. After three days He rose again from the dead to proclaim His victory over death, hell, and Satan. He rose again to proclaim to all His faithful children that there was now a place in heaven waiting for them... and waiting for you.

Because of all that Jesus Christ has done for each and every one of us, those who are living by faith, through faith, have heaven waiting for them. Though as we live out our days it will not be easy. Satan will attack and tempt us all the days long. He will want us to find a way into heaven that is not through that narrow gate... but we need to hold strong to the narrow gate, the narrow way, Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself states (John 10), "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture... I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of

this fold; them also I must bring, and they will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again." Unlike those who heard Jesus but did not have faith... Jesus' sheep hear Him and know Him. They listen to His voice, and He promises them a place in heaven.

"And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last." This is a verse that can cause some initial confusion for people but it is a verse that is true nonetheless. What Jesus is emphasizing in this piece of Scripture is exactly what Paul warns us about in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor 10:12), "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ... Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Jesus here is warning all the faithful that those who may have the best pedigree may not be in heaven, and those who are not so “high” as others may indeed be there. Jesus is simply warning us to watch out and not get puffed up... we are to be faithful Christians, not prideful and vain Christians. We are to live by faith in all that Christ has done... not in what we have done and how great our heritage is. We are to live lives that make God smile, not grieve His heart.

Dear friends in Christ, with the warning just issued I hope you can now see why my Lego guys will not be in heaven. While they may live near ‘perfect’ outward lives, they have no faith... they are not real. However, we are encouraged to live lives of faith... to struggle to make it through the narrow gate. We are to struggle to stay faithful and true to our narrow gate, Jesus Christ. And at times that will be difficult, but God has promised that He will always be with us to help and strengthen us. One way that He does this is by offering us His very body and blood. So that unlike those in the parable we can say that we did eat and drink

with Christ, and not just in His presence, and that we strengthened in our faith, through that Holy Supper.

I pray that through His Holy meal we are about to receive, God would strengthen that faith that He has placed inside each and every one of us... so that we know, we believe, we have faith that God has reserved for us ***A Place in the Kingdom of God.***

Thanks be to God. Amen.