

## Strive to Enter Heaven by the Narrow Door

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the gospel of Luke chapter 13:22-24.

For as long as I can remember, I've been fascinated by the story of the Titanic. For our younger listeners, the Titanic was a huge ocean liner that sailed on its first voyage about 105 years ago and sadly its first voyage was also its last. Four days into its maiden voyage it struck an iceberg and sank. 2/3rds of its passengers were lost in the icy water.

I have a book about the Titanic called *Ghosts of the Abyss*. It has old photographs of the ocean liner before its launch, and vivid, haunting photographs of the Titanic where it rests now, more than 12,000 feet under the surface. When my son Matthew was about 5 years old he got his hands on it and was fascinated by the photographs and pictures, but that night as I was putting him to bed he told me that one picture bothered him. It was an artist's rendering of that fateful night, picturing a few lifeboats with maybe a hundred people in them, and in the distance the Titanic had just broken in half and was about to sink beneath the surface, and there were crowds of people on its deck. I think what bothered Matt was seeing so few people were saved and so many people were lost that night.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (remember that – it is important) when a man in the crowd shouts out a question: *Lord, will those who are saved be few?* He's asking, how many will make it into heaven? Just a few? And the implied question is, how many won't make it into heaven? How many will be lost? He's asking Jesus to paint a picture of how few will be saved and how many will be lost.

Jesus refuses to paint that picture. Jesus doesn't answer this man's question, *how many will be saved?* Instead Jesus tells him *how* to be saved. That's the far more important question for us. We don't need to know how many will be saved, we need to know how to be saved.

### I. The narrow door is the only way to enter the kingdom of God

*"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (vs. 24)*

Enter what? Clearly entering is the same as being saved, so what does Jesus mean when he says strive to enter through the narrow door? A few verses later he makes it clear he's talking about who will enter the kingdom of God and who will not be able to enter the kingdom of God. He's talking about entering heaven. Those who enter heaven will be saved. Those shut out of heaven will be lost forever.

The Bible says that God has set eternity in our hearts. We are eternal creatures. This short life isn't all there is, it's just the voyage that's meant to get us to eternal life. You were created to live forever with God in His perfect, eternal kingdom. The most important question we will ever answer is where we will spend eternity.

Jesus says strive to enter the kingdom of heaven through the narrow door cause those who seek to enter heaven any other way will not be able to get in. But what is the narrow door?

### II. The narrow door is Jesus

In John 10 Jesus tells us the narrow door is him. Jesus is the narrow door by which we enter heaven.

*So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved... John 10:7-9*

Jesus is the narrow door, and he promises that anyone who enters by him will be saved. Notice that Jesus stresses the narrowness and the singularity of that door. Only one door and it is narrow. There aren't many ways into heaven, there is only one way and it is narrow. The door into heaven is Jesus. He's the only way for us to enter heaven. Why is Jesus the only door into heaven?

Remember I said it was important for us to remember that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem when the man asked his question. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to be crucified. He's going to give his life willingly in our place. To die for our sins so that we could be saved. Only Jesus could do that. Only Jesus, as the Son of God, could live the perfect life that we can't live, obeying and pleasing God in everything he did. Only Jesus could stand in our place by dying on the cross and pay the debt we owed God so that we could be forgiven. Only Jesus could bear the punishment that God's justice demanded so completely that God's wrath for our sin would be completely satisfied. Jesus' last words were "it is finished" – the work of salvation was finished by Jesus. Only Jesus. And God testified to Jesus' finished work by raising him from the dead on the third day.

No one else could ever do this. Only Jesus.

Jesus says *no one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6). There is no other way for us to get to God except through Jesus. Jesus is the narrow door.

### **III. We enter the narrow door by faith in Jesus Christ**

So we know that the narrow door is Jesus and through him we enter heaven, but how do we enter? Jesus said *strive* to enter by the narrow door. Many will try and not be able to enter. For a long time that made me feel like you had to be some kind of special, cream of the crop, select person to make it. The door is narrow, you need to strive to enter, many will try and not be able to enter. That sounds like only the best among us will be able to make it.

It reminds me of the story of the high school that invited recruiters from the Army, Navy, and Marines to speak at an assembly to recruit students to join their services. Each of them were given 10 minutes to share, and they were told to watch the time carefully because the bell would ring in exactly 30 minutes. The Army guy went over his ten minutes, speaking for 15 minutes. Time got away from the Navy officer as well and he spoke for 14 minutes. The principle leaned to the Marine recruiter and whispered, I'm sorry, but you only have one minute to share before the bell rings.

The Marine recruiter went to the lectern and then just stood there. He didn't say a word, just silently looked the crowd over. Ten seconds went by. Twenty. Thirty. It got uncomfortable as he just stood there looking at the students. Forty five seconds. Finally, with ten seconds left, he said, "As I look at this assembly, I see 3, maybe 4 here that have what it takes to be a Marine. If you think that's you, come see me after the assembly." After the bell rang, he had by far the longest line of students waiting to speak with him.

Something in all of us want to be among the elite. The few. The proud. The Marines.

When I read Jesus' word Jesus' words, I still have to fight the urge to think what he's saying is, "only a few of you have what it takes to follow me. The few. The proud. The follower of Christ" Do you have what it takes? Are you elite enough?

But this turns it all on us. In a sense we become the narrow door, making our way into heaven by being elite enough to qualify. Am I dedicated enough? Devoted enough? Holy enough? Do I love enough, give enough, serve enough, deny yourself enough, sacrifice enough, follow Jesus enough? It turns it all back on me: I, I, I,I,I.

But Jesus is the narrow door, not me. He made the way, not me. He finished the work on the cross, not me. Striving to enter by the narrow door doesn't mean being elite enough to enter, it means believing in Jesus. It doesn't mean being elite, it means just the opposite: every time I am tempted to think it all depends on me, every time I'm tempted to turn it back on me and what I do or don't do, I strive to believe in Jesus. Period. Strive to put all my faith in Jesus, not on myself. Strive to trust that his death was sufficient and there's nothing I could ever add to save myself.

When people try to talk you out of your faith, when even your own heart says, "you don't really believe in Jesus, do you?" You strive to answer, "yes, I believe in Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back."

Strive to believe in Jesus. That's it. Jesus is the narrow door. Jesus is the lifeboat. Believing in Jesus means getting in and letting him carry you to safety.

For those of you who are getting baptized, please come up and sit in the front row here. Baptism is a public declaration that Jesus is your Savior, that you are a follower of Christ. You are saying, "I believe in Jesus and I want the world to know."

The Bible says that when we believe in Christ, we are made one with Christ in his death (we died with him) and in his resurrection (we have been raised in newness of life with him). Baptism symbolizes that spiritual reality: as we lower you into the water, it symbolizes your dying and being buried with Christ.

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*  
**Romans 6:3**

And as we lift you you back up, it symbolizes your being raised up in newness of life in Christ.

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* **Romans 6:4**