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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 9, 2014
22nd Sunday Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Haggai 2:1-9; Colossians 3:1-4
Hymns: 226:1-3&8; 351; 416; 54 (798:1,3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 13:23-30

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." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Gaining entrance to exclusive skyboxes.

You go to a ballgame and there are a lot of different gates into the stadium, but actually any of them will work. Yes, you try to enter the gate that is closest to your assigned seats, but if you get the wrong one it doesn't really matter that much. You walk around and you will get to the right place. At each gate there are several different turnstiles where someone will take your ticket. Streams of people are all entering the venue at the same time all over the place.

Now, if you try to enter one of the fancy corporate boxes at the top of the stadium, there you won't find many doors. There you won't find easy access. There you will have to possess the right pass or there will be no admittance. In fact you will have to know how to find that door.

Which is more like the kingdom of heaven? We know that God desires all to be saved. God's desire has always been that all people would enter into heaven, but that doesn't mean that one may enter anyway one might choose. No, there is only that one Gate which Jesus describes in our text and those who would be saved must --

THEME: Gain Access through the Narrow Gate of Christ's Kingdom.

The first issue is --

I. Recognizing the Narrow Gate.

Luke 13:23-24 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.

There was a common assumption among the people of the Jews that they would all get to enter into heaven simply because they were Jews; they were descended from the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that would be sufficient to qualify them for heaven. Apparently, after listening to Jesus' teaching, at least one among them had begun to wonder if that were true, and so the question was presented to Jesus, "**Are there few who are saved?**"

Jesus' answer makes it clear that entering heaven is not something to be taken for granted. This is rather something that commands our attention. To attain that goal of heaven one should strive to enter the narrow gate, a gate that would indeed preclude the idea of many easily flowing through into heavenly glory.

The first step to achieving that goal, and striving for that narrow gate would be that one must be able to recognize and see that gate. Many are blind to it. Many walk right past the narrow gate and think little of it. **The gate of which Jesus speaks in our text is the Lord Jesus Himself.** The danger is that we be misled so that we fail to recognize the gate even when it is held right before us. Paul warns:

Colossians 2:8 “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

The ideas of the world are centered in a man's own good deeds. People commonly think of these good things that we do as being the key to attaining merit with God and gaining access to heaven. Attached to that is the view of the greatness of the glory of man, and man's superior wisdom, and man's ability to achieve all that is necessary for eternal life. Jesus is presented by the world as a great teacher and a fine example of living a good life for others emulate. This is the philosophy of the world. We are easily swept along by this thinking because our own fleshly reason is attracted to it and would like it to be true. But it is **not** true. This is the thinking that would cheat us out of eternal life. We must strive against it!

And yes, Christians are susceptible to this false thinking. Paul had to exhort these gentile Colossian Christians not to fall for the deceit of a group referred to as the Judaizers. They began to follow after Paul and tell the new Christians that all that Paul had taught them was true, but now they were going to teach them a more complete gospel that included the works of the law, including the ceremonial Old Testament law. Desiring to serve the Lord and finding their own fleshly reason agreeing with this teaching, these naïve Christians were deceived and in danger of being cheated out of the precious salvation Christ had won for them. So Paul continued in to say to them:

Colossians 2:16-19a “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 **Let no one cheat you** of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head.”

Jesus is that Head. Jesus is the narrow gate through which we must pass to enter heaven. Jesus is the only way for it is “**not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us**” (Titus 3:5). It is Jesus’ works that save. It is Jesus’ righteousness that avails before God. It is Jesus that opens the way to heaven. Strive to enter that narrow gate which is Christ. And don’t delay, because --

II. Timing is so important!

Luke 13:25 “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,’”

Jesus wanted this point to be comprehended by His audience, and it remains important for us yet today. This is the time for us to learn of Jesus and follow Him as disciples. It is while we are alive in this life that we are granted the time of grace in which we hear the gospel, and come to faith, and so are saved. The problem arises when we cling to this life too tightly, and by that I don’t mean that we shouldn’t cherish every day of this temporal life as a precious gift from God. What I mean is that we get caught up in the activities and pursuits of this life so that we are too busy for the Lord. What I mean by that is that our sinful flesh doesn’t want to let go of even its sinful pleasures. When we are young one might think I have a lot of time for religion later. I will follow the Lord **later**. When one gets older it only gets harder to let go of the sin which so easily ensnares us. We will continue to be inclined to think, “**Tomorrow, I will repent tomorrow.**” We all know all too well that with our procrastinating ways it often happens that

tomorrow never comes. And then it happens that an individual runs out of tomorrows. Then it is too late and then there is only regret.

That was Jesus' lesson, His warning. Don't procrastinate! Now is your time to hear the Word of the Lord. Paul also picked up this important message citing the Old Testament to encourage Christians to be diligent in this time of grace.

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you."

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Now is the time to believe. Later could easily, tragically be too late! Then --

III. Vain Claims of Association Won't Open that Door!

Jesus made this point in this parable saying—

Luke 13:26-28 "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."

It won't do the Jewish people any good on the last day for them to say, but Lord we were there and heard You preach. We were there when You fed the five thousand. Lord, we were there when You did all your miracles. Hanging around Jesus as He conducted His ministry wasn't what was necessary. **Believing Jesus' words, trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior was necessary.** With that faith lacking their claims of associating with the Lord will be denied. They will hear the dreadful response, "**I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.**"

Can you imagine hearing anything more dreadful than that? And yet many will still wonder why they were excluded. Many will point to how they attended Sunday school or did their catechism lessons, or did fine things for church, or even attended services regularly. However, if that was all simply empty form without true faith, it will do them no good. **It needs to be accompanied by faith.** Faith needs to direct life throughout one's life. It won't be enough to have some association with others who believed. It will only make it a far more bitter disappointment to see those others enter into the heavenly mansions with the patriarchs and the prophets and then to be excluded.

Have no fear, the Lord is not limited in extending His gracious salvation to one nationality. What we see is that --

IV. God's Far Reaching Grace Assures Diversity.

The Lord calls people of all nations to be His children and heirs of everlasting life. Jesus acknowledged this wondrous grace in our text when he said:

Luke 13:29-30 "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."

This is the grace that has come to us today. The Lord sent His apostles into all the world to preach the gospel to sinners everywhere. Yes, they started in Jerusalem, but they were not limited in reaching out to Jews. The Jews were to hear the gospel first for to them was entrusted the oracles of God. But time and again the apostles then turned to the gentiles who eagerly heard the gospel, and by the power of the Spirit believed in Jesus Christ as their Redeemer from sin and death.

And so it is that by the Spirit's grace we have had the precious opportunity to hear the Word of the Lord Jesus with our ears, and by the power of the Spirit we have been called to repentance and faith that leads to everlasting life. So it is that there will be those who late in the history of the world will enter into the kingdom of God, and there will tragically be those heard the gracious promises

of the Lord early in history, or early in their individual lives who let it slip away, and will be left weeping bitter tears.

CONCLUSION: Strive to enter through the narrow gate! Don't let pride lead us to cling to false hopes of our own righteousness. Don't let the busy-ness of life distract you from the Lord. Don't let the allure of carnal pleasure or earthly success supplant the Lord's place in your lives. Strive to enter by the narrow gate which is Christ Jesus. Cling to him by faith in His Word. Stay in the Word that you might also stay in His grace and in the end gain access into Kingdom of Christ's glory.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.