

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ninth Sunday After Trinity, July 24, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 11, 23:4, 278, 605, 605:5.

Lessons: Genesis 6:5-8, Hebrews 12:7-13, Luke 19:11-27.

Sermon Text: Luke 13:23-30.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed,

Curiosity can be good under certain circumstances, and it can also be bad. If a person is curious about something he really needs to know, it's good that he finds out all that he can about it. But if a person is curious about a matter which is none of his business or something which is not important for him to know, it's better if that curiosity is not satisfied.

In our text we are told of the kind of curiosity which ought not to be satisfied. As Jesus was traveling through towns and villages on the way to Jerusalem, ***“Someone asked him, ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?’”*** He did not speak about the number to be saved. He answered by speaking about the importance of every person repenting. He spoke about the extreme urgency of repenting. So, let us today hear the admonition:

REPENT BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!

- 1. What repentance means; and,**
- 2. When it will be too late.**

Instead of being curious about the number who will be saved, the Lord Jesus wants us to be concerned about our own salvation. He says: ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*** When Jesus speaks about making every effort to enter the narrow door, He is speaking about the concern we ought to have for going to heaven. The Lord is concerned about our salvation. Peter writes that the Lord does not want ***“anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV) So the Lord also wants each one of us to be concerned about our salvation. He says ***“Make every effort”*** He means we should earnestly strive for this. We should contend for this, just as a runner in a race uses all his strength to win the race. Paul spoke in a similar way: ***“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.”*** 1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV) We should exert ourselves to the utmost to enter the kingdom of God by true repentance. This is the opposite of carelessly living in sin. This is the opposite of ignoring the Word of God or being indifferent to it.

Jesus says ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door”*** The door or gate through which we must enter in order to be saved is none other than Jesus Himself. Jesus says: ***“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”*** John 10:9 (NIV) He again says: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** John 14:6 (NIV) The book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the great High Priest who opened up the way to the heavenly Father by sacrificing His body and shedding His blood.

Why is it that entering the door to salvation is called entering the ***“narrow”*** door? We can think of some wrong reasons why some might consider it a narrow door. That Jesus didn't die for all people is such a wrong idea, or that the requirements of God are so strict that only a few can make it. That is contrary to what the Bible teaches. The Bible says: ***“He died for all”*** 2 Corinthians 5:14 (NIV) The Bible pictures the Gospel of salvation as a feast fully prepared for all, and the Lord invites us, saying ***“Come, for everything is now ready.”*** Luke 14:17 (NIV) In similar picture language Isaiah records God's invitation to poor sinners: ***“Come, all you***

who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Isaiah 55:1 (NIV)

In view of these gracious invitations, why does Jesus call the door to life narrow? There is only one reason. It is too narrow for all who refuse to repent. And repentance means to confess our sinfulness in heartfelt sorrow and to trust in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. The door is too narrow for those who self-righteously try to enter heaven with a big bundle of their good works on their back. That bundle simply won't fit through the opening! In other words, the door to heaven is too narrow for those who refuse to confess their sins; for those who think they can earn God's favor by doing good. For what does the Bible say about our own works? It says ***“... all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”*** Isaiah 64:6 (NIV) Of all those proud do-gooders the psalmist says: ***“The arrogant cannot stand in your presence”*** Psalm 5:5 (NIV) It is man's unwillingness to repent, his relying on his own works and his refusal to accept Jesus' righteousness by faith, that makes the door to life narrow.

Jesus says in our text: ***“many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*** Too many people are like the proud Pharisee in the temple who boasted about how good he was. Too few are like the humble tax collector who pleaded: ***“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”*** Luke 18:13 (NIV)

Oh, let us not rely on our own righteousness, for that cannot save us. The Apostle Paul says: ***“in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.”*** Romans 1:17 (NIV) The righteousness that saves is not found in man, but it is from God in Christ Jesus. When Jeremiah foretold of the coming Savior, he called Him: ***“The LORD Our Righteousness.”*** Jeremiah 23:6 (NIV) Jesus perfectly fulfilled all of God's commandments. Jesus made a perfect atonement for all our sins. He earned righteousness for us. And Paul writes: ***“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*** Romans 3:22 (NIV)

So when Jesus says in our text: ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door,”*** He is saying that we should repent of our sins, not trust in our righteousness, but trust in Jesus' blood and righteousness. He is saying that we should be concerned about our eternal salvation. He is saying we should always make every effort to hear the Word of God. For it is in the Gospel that we learn of Jesus' righteousness, and it is the powerful Gospel Word which can give us faith to believe in Jesus. ***“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** Romans 10:17 (NIV)

The rest of our text teaches why this is such an urgent matter. Therefore, as we consider the admonition, Repent, before it is too late, let us learn from our text when it is too late.

2.

Jesus continues with the picture of entering heaven through a door. He warns now: ***“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.'”*** Obviously Jesus is speaking about trying enter into heaven after it is too late. Salvation is not something which one can put off to another time. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians: ***“we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”*** 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (NIV) Isaiah wrote: ***“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”*** Isaiah 55:6 (NIV) The Savior graciously invites all sinners: ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*** Matthew 11:28 (NIV) Many people hear the invitation, but turn a deaf ear to it. They are too busy with their worldly pursuits, too busy with making a living, and don't have time to hear God's Word. Others do not take advantage of hearing and learning God's Word when they still have the opportunity to hear it in its truth and purity. And because of their indifference to pure doctrine, the devil succeeds in robbing them of the Word of God. Then they become like the people Paul described: people who ***“will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”*** 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (NIV) This has already happened in many churches. If we neglect the Word and doctrine it will happen among us also. Once the Gospel is lost, for those who no longer can hear it, it will be too late.

The great Day of Judgment, of course, will be the time when once for all it will be too late. On that solemn day, when all mankind is gathered before the judgment seat of Christ, many will hear the Judge say: ***“I***

don't know you or where you come from.” Then excuses won’t do any good. Jesus says: **“Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'”** This was the excuse that the Jews at Jesus’ time would give. Indeed, Jesus was in their midst with all His blessings. But they didn’t listen. They despised their Messiah and crucified Him. The same excuse might be offered today by what we call nominal Christians, Christians in name only. They plead: We were baptized and confirmed and were members of the church all our life. But what good is that if such nominal Christians don’t hear the Word, don’t repent of their sins, and don’t trust in Jesus? To all such Jesus will say: **“I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!”** This is what Jesus says also in the Gospel of Matthew: **“Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”** Matthew 25:41 (NIV)

Then all who refused to repent and died in unbelief will go to hell. Our text describes it. **“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 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.”** In hell there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and not only because of the torment suffered there, but also because the damned in hell will see that the believers in Christ are enjoying heaven’s blessedness but they are left out. They will then be filled with remorse, with bitter disappointment. Especially that will be so when the unbelievers see that the last are first. Applied to the Jews, it means that the Gentile nations who did not have all the advantages of the Jews, have many from among them who believed in Jesus and go to heaven. The Jews with all their advantages of having the prophets preach to them and having Jesus in their very midst, for the most part have not accepted their Savior, and thus will be left out of heaven’s blessedness in eternity.

Applied to us today, Jesus teaches that there are also first who will be last and last who will be first. Those who didn’t have all the advantages of being brought up in a Christian home, and learned of salvation in Christ later in life, are the ones who often appreciate the Gospel of Christ more than those who have heard the Word all their lives. These same people often appreciate the importance of pure doctrine more than those who have had opportunity to learn God’s Word all their life.

For us, who for many years have had great opportunity to hear and learn God’s Word, our text is an urgent call to repent before it is too late! And true repentance must be a daily thing! May we hear the Word, repent of our sins, trust in Jesus as our Savior, and then, by God’s grace, we will enjoy all the blessedness of heaven that our Lord and Savior won for us. Amen.

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