

Hunter's First Sermon at St. John

8/17/10

For \$12.79 a web site promises a spot in heaven, 100% guaranteed or your money back. YES REALLY. Everyone seems to be looking for their ticket to heaven, and everyone has a theory on how to get there; Churches argue about IT, people debate it. The thing is, its not just our society that has been wondering about the way to heaven, its been a question since the beginning of time, since the very fall of man. We see a perfect example of it in today's Gospel lesson, where a man asks Jesus, "**Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?**" Perhaps the man was wondering even more so "Will I be one of them?" Jesus' answer in verse 24 is one that we would be wise to consider, as 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.**"

So how do we enter this narrow door? Perhaps our good deeds will grant the way to salvation, swinging wide the gates of heaven that we might enter? To tell you the truth, my Christian friends, this has become an entirely too popular notion in society today. Romans 3:23 tell us that "**all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**" My brothers and sisters in Christ, our very sinful nature bars us from the gates of God's paradise. I know my own sins; I know that on my best days I fall pitifully short of God's glorious perfection. IN FACT, IN MANY WAYS OUR SINS CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS, AND WE HURT OTHERS AND DISGRACE GOD. Can anyone of us say we are without sin? And if we cannot, how can anyone lay claim to spot in heaven? By our own account, we are all lost dear brothers and sisters.

Yet, so often we get it stuck in our minds that this is the way we are to live. We go to church, we give our offering, we give to charity, we do good deeds; all wonderful things, all good and desirable things, but we do it out of necessity, because in our minds our salvation depends on what we do and what we say. We feel as though we could say exactly as those IN OUR LESSON FOR TODAY sitting outside saying, "**We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.**" We feel like we could say, "God, I went to Church every Sunday, I prayed for you to join us at dinner, I told others about you." Yet it is not the deed which God looks to but our heart. Indeed, sin has voided our sacrifices to God as a payment through the narrow door.

A few years ago, I was helping my father make some renovations to his store downtown and we had to fill in a gap in the a wall that had once been a door by building a small wall to fill the space. Well, my father went to get some more building materials leaving a friend and myself to fit the wall into the

door frame. The problem was, we built the wall a bit too tall. So no matter how hard we tried to hammer or push the wall into place, it wouldn't budge, we simply couldn't fit it through the door. So then we had a great idea, 'why not tie a rope to the wall and attach the other end to my friend's truck, then he can lightly tap the accelerator and the wall will move into space.' Well, my definition of 'lightly tap' and his were quite different. He hit the accelerator and the wall tore through the door frame and the whole wall had to be rebuilt before my father returned.

How often do we do this? We, who cannot fit through the door because of our sins, try to tie ourselves to the good deeds we do, in order to try and force our way through the narrow door. Yet unlike my story, we can't tear our way through the door. Instead we must find another way to fit through the door.

So here we sit, stuck in our sin, wholly incapable of helping ourselves. And there lies the beauty of our faith. For all those before us have felt exactly the same way. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians **"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life, indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."** Our salvation relies not on ourselves, but on God, as the well-quoted John 3:16 says, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life."** Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our way to heaven. In John 10:7 Jesus calls himself **the gate or door** for the sheep, and in John 14 Jesus proclaims **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."** Christ takes us, strips us of our sins, which hold us from entering the door, and fits us perfectly through the door. Like a carpenter skillfully crafts a wall to fit where it should, so our Lord does the same to us. Thankfully he's a much better carpenter than I.

Dear brothers and sisters, our salvation is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, he has taken your sins from you and carried them for you, carried them to the cross, where he allowed himself to be crucified, and died, bearing the sins of the world, that our sins may no longer separate us from the love of God. Brothers and sisters, what Christ is asking is that we stop relying on our selves and trust in him. That is what is needed to enter through the narrow door, is trust in God. What too often separates us isn't a lack of effort but a lack of trust. As Paul says in Ephesians, **"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, that no one can boast."** The difference between those outside the door and those who have entered is often a

matter of trust. When we count on ourselves to pave the way to heaven, we fail. It is only through faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ that we can enter through. It is when we quit proclaiming what “we” did, and instead point to him, trusting that he will bring us into the Kingdom.

My little brother Noah asked me a question one day a few years ago. Noah has always asked me questions as he has grown up, and one day about 3 years ago he asked me why we needed to go to Church and Sunday School if we knew Jesus and he forgave us, I thought for a second and said, “Noah what does a painter do?” “Paint,” Noah answered. Then I asked, “What does a hockey player do?” Noah, being a hockey player, said, “Play hockey.” Then I asked Noah, “What does a Christian do?” Noah thought for a second, and he began to realize, that if something is our PART OF WHO WE ARE, OR PART OF WHO GOD MADE US TO BE, then we will follow it. It is for this reason we do good works, not for the necessity of salvation, but because of our faith in our Lord and Creator. Some will say, “if Christ died for our sins and our faith takes us to heaven, why do good works?” My Christian friends, we do not do good deeds because they will take us to heaven, we do good deeds because if Christ is our LORD AND SAVIOR / passion, then we will live our LIFE / passion as a painter lives their passion or a hockey player lives their passion.

JESUS SAYS, **24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.** JESUS IS THE ONLY DOOR THROUGH WHICH WE ENTER ETERNAL LIFE. AS YOU BELIEVE IN JESUS, WORK TO STAY IN FAITH AND STAY STRONG. Therefore, let us strive to enter through the narrow door, trusting in Christ’s saving grace, living good and faithful lives because Christ is our LORD / passion and Savior, our Rock and our Redeemer, who opens the door to eternal life to us. Amen.

BIBLE VERSES

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 13:22-30 (*Strive to enter through the narrow door, said the Lord Jesus.*)

22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, **24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door,** because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 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.' 26 "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' 27 "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' 28 "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. 29 People will come from east and west and north

and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

John 10:1-10 (7) – "Truly truly I say to you, 'I am the gate (door) for the sheep'"

Romans 3:23 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Ephesians 2:8-9 – For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, that no one can boast

John 14:6 – Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me

2 Corinthians 1:8 – We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life, indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.