

Sermon Luke 13 22 30 14th S af Pent SC

Sermon: 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 13:22-30 (v. 24)

Theme: Make every effort

Goal: To encourage people to fix their eyes on Jesus not to be diverted by the sinful attractions next to the path to heaven.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We believe and always preach and teach that salvation is free, by grace, by faith in Jesus. We cannot do anything to be worthy of heaven, but it is a gift of God. How do we reconcile this text with the free salvation Jesus offers to us in the Bible?

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.” What kind of efforts shall we make? *I don't like narrowness; I live in a culture in which broadness, tolerance, and inclusiveness are the virtues of the day. Jesus' words seem out of step with my world and it makes me uncomfortable* (Phil Brandt, p. 47).

I – It is not easy to be a Christian

It is not that easy to be a Christian, as some think. Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). To deny ourselves means to acknowledge that we are weak and sinners, it means to fight against temptation, means not to follow the paths of this corrupted world; means to repent daily from your sins. On the other hand, to deny ourselves means to rely only on Jesus, to cling to Him by faith in such a manner for good and for bad that His will is our will. It is to believe in the promises of God that, by faith in Jesus, we are forgiven; and to commit ourselves to Jesus. – But how can we do it if we like to be independent, to take our own decisions, to walk our own way?

Take time to have a look at people who enter the broad door, who follow their own will, and just follow the lust of their flesh. It seems that they are enjoying life more than us, without restriction. Maybe some become very rich and build up a good career. We know the stories of several billionaires who become desperate at the end of their life because they cannot take anything with them. Others shortened their lives by drunkenness, drugs, immorality... And they call it “freedom”, when it is, in fact, a slavery.

It is not easy to be a Christian and to enter through the narrow door. Many people call themselves Christians, are even members of the church – some of them active members – but they take life easy, doing only what is pleasant for them, and do not “make every effort to enter the narrow door”. This was the situation of many at Jesus’ time, when Jesus threatened them that they would stay outside the door. They knew Jesus, but they were not friends to Jesus. They went to the church, but just as a matter of tradition and out of duty; not by faith in action, not by love to God and not by love to the neighbor. They didn’t “make every effort to enter through the narrow door”, but they preferred to walk their own way.

II – It is easy to be a Christian

On the other hand, it is easy to be a Christian. The narrow door is Christ Himself, who introduced Himself as “the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The huge wall that separates us from God – sin and all its consequences – has a cross shaped narrow door. Once inside, we are saved. Not that we are free from temptations or from suffering this side of heaven; but we have someone who walks with us and strengthens us: The Son of God, who paid for our sins on the cross. We are not alone.

To enter through the narrow door means to allow God to guide us along our paths. The 10 Commandments are not just a “must”, but they are a secure path to show us where to walk and a fence to protect us, not allowing us to surpass to the dangerous and sinful life across the fence. Just to highlight one Commandment: *Does the command to marital fidelity constrict our lives or does it fence off a dangerous pit of emotional heartache and misery?* (Phil Brandt, p. 11). We are surrounded by an evil world and subjected to many dangers and sufferings. But we have someone with us, who had opened the way for us much before we began to walk through it; and He reached the goal: The gate of heaven, opening it to all who follow Him. It is not a meaningless life running after the wind; but it’s a secure path with a secure goal.

We cannot divert our eyes from Jesus and follow some other paths. “Let us fix your eyes on Jesus!”, says the author of the letter to the Hebrews (12:2). As we are in the Olympic Season, *perhaps an illustration from the world of sports can help us here. When cycling on a mountain path through rocks, the key is to keep one’s eyes on the path between the obstacles. If you look at the rocks, you will hit them. Our human nature often wants to focus on the obstacle and not the path between them.* (Phil Brandt, p. 9). This makes our Christian life difficult and it’s easy to slip away and to crash. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus” and follow the way freely, even if it is narrow.

III – It is easy to reach heaven

If we fix our eyes on Jesus, nothing will be too narrow to divert our hope and our faith. There is plenty of place in heaven. Jesus said: “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God”, with “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets”. When Jesus commanded the Baptism, as little Kiera was baptized today, He

said: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20). God doesn't discriminate anyone, but He wants people from all nations, races, classes, languages to repent from their wrong ways or from their lassitude, to believe in Jesus, and to follow the narrow path.

Conclusion: The common proverb *All paths lead to God* is not true. There is only one narrow path that leads to heaven. God is inclusive in a manner that he accepts everyone, even the repented robber in the last minute on the cross side by side to Jesus. On the other hand, God is exclusive in the sense that there is only one way to come to Him: Through His Son Jesus Christ, the narrow door.

If you want to reach some place, you have to take the right way. If you want to go to Waterfront, you cannot take the N1 in direction to Paarl. You have to take the right direction. If you take the wrong direction, you have to do a U-turn. - This is exactly what repentance means: To stop walking in the wrong direction toward the wrong aim, to do a U-turn in your life, and to follow Jesus.

A commentary wrote: *If the way to heaven is hard and the door is narrow, what makes it narrow, what makes it so hard? I firmly believe that Jesus loves all people and that he has freely given Himself as a ransom for the sins of the whole world. There is not a thing we must do to be a Christian. In that sense the way is very broad. And yet, it is also quite narrow. There is only one Name under heaven by which men may be saved and that name happens to be Jesus.* (Phil Brandt, p. 7). Amen.