

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.”** (NIV84)

Theme: Struggle to Enter through the Narrow Gate

1. No one is entitled to enter.
2. Cast off everything that may hinder our entrance.

Right now there are many football players all around the nation trying to make a team. There are all sorts of people trying out for a football team. There are those who try harder than anyone else, but then you have the talented but lazy. There are the veterans who think they should get the nod over others simply because they have been there the longest. You have guys who buy into the system and listen to the coach. Then you have others who do their own thing. All of these players are simply hoping to make the team and perhaps to start. But in the end the players don’t get to decide if they make the team or not. The coach decides. Often he will choose the one who works hard over the lazy player with more talent. Or he will choose the one who buys into the system and does what he is supposed to do over the one who doesn’t listen to the coaches.

Now every analogy limps—and this one limps greatly in spots. But the point is this—God chooses who gets into heaven. Many think that they should get in simply because of who they are or what they have done—regardless of their faith. Others assume they don’t have to work hard to maintain their faith. Today Jesus warns us that it easy to enter heaven. Therefore we should struggle to enter through the narrow gate. There is no one who is entitled to enter so we should cast off everything that may hinder us.

There are roads that lead to many different places. If you get on the wrong road, you may end up at the wrong place. The same stands for heaven and hell. There are many roads. There is only one road that leads to heaven. All others lead to hell. Get on the wrong road, and you will end up at the wrong place. As Jesus said in Matthew 7, **Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.** These words are similar to what Jesus said in verse 24 of our text for today where he also said that the door to enter heaven is narrow.

There is only one way to heaven. Jesus said in John 14, **I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** The only way to heaven is through Christ. All who believe in him will have eternal life. Jesus is also the gate into heaven. As Jesus said in John 10, **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.** Jesus is the only way to heaven. And he is the only door into heaven—he is the only way people get into heaven. Whoever does not believe in him will not be saved. No matter who they are, what they do, or what else they believe in—they will not get into heaven.

Many Jews didn’t agree with Jesus. They thought that they could get to heaven simply because of who they were. They were God’s chosen children. Part of the nation God chose out of all others. They were children of the promise. Direct descendants of Abraham. Through them was to come the Messiah. They thought they were special—entitled to get to heaven.

That same thinking is still around today. You may have the thought that you are entitled to heaven. Simply because of who you are. You are a member of Holy Cross. You have been for years. You've been part of a Lutheran congregation your whole life. Or you've been a Christian your whole life. You think that membership in an outward congregation entitles you to eternal life.

Or perhaps you'll get to heaven because of what you have done. Not only have you been a member of Christian church for a long time, but you are also faithful. You go to worship almost every Sunday. You attend Bible Class. You volunteer your time again and again. Perhaps you even give a good amount in your offerings every week. You're nice to others—helping those in need. You have never committed any major crime and you have done a pretty good job of keeping God's commands. And that must count for something right?

But it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you have done. Without Christ you aren't on the right path. Without Christ you won't get through the narrow door. Instead you be outside the door. It will be closed to you. You will cry out to God, "I knew you, I did things for you, I was there every Sunday." Just like those who cried out, **We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.** And Jesus will respond, **I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!**

Paul was right when he wrote in Romans 11, **all Israel will be saved.** But as he points out in our second lesson, **Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.** You are Israel. You are a child of Abraham, not by physical descent, but by spiritual descent. Abraham believed the Lord and was credited to him as righteousness. The same stands for true Israel. They share the same faith in the promise as Abraham. It's faith in Christ—as the promised Messiah. Through faith in Christ we receive the blessings he won for us. Through faith in Christ we are considered righteous.

In our text for today Jesus was quick to point out that there would be many Jews in heaven, and many Jews who didn't make it through the narrow door. They weren't entitled to heaven. But only through faith would they be allowed in. Plenty of others will also enter through that narrow gate. They come from every corner of the earth. **People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.** Through the gospel

many people from every language and nation in the world are brought to faith. That includes you. Through faith you are on the right way and will enter through the narrow gate. And so you will live with Christ and all believers forever in heaven.

You aren't entitled to eternal life. What matters is faith in Christ. And that faith can be easily lost. So we struggle against that which is sinful so that we may not hinder our entrance into heaven.

The way to heaven is a long, narrow road. And that road is often long and difficult. And the door is narrow. So it's not easy to enter into heaven. That is why Jesus tells us in our text for today to, **Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.** Life for a Christian is a battle. It's a struggle each and every day. Daily we battle against the devil, the world, and our sinful desires.

That battle starts with repentance. It is realizing your sinful actions—having a deep-felt guilt and sorrow because of them. It is trusting in Jesus for forgiveness. It is turning away from your sin and turning instead to God. It is doing what is right instead of what is wrong. The battle means denying what the devil, the world, and your sinful nature wants in favor of what God wants. It means putting your wants and desires behind those of God and others. For every sin separates us from God—and so every sin puts our faith in jeopardy. So we struggle against our sinful nature each and every day.

But it's hard to fight all the time. The struggle gets tiring. It's easy to stop fighting. It's easy to stop making an effort to enter the narrow gate. It's also fun. It would be fun to do whatever you want to do with whomever you want, and not worry about the consequences. Our sinful nature wants nothing more than for us to let ourselves go spiritually. Just give it all up and have some fun. Your Old Adam asks, "why keep on fighting, why struggle, why make yourself miserable?" Just give it up.

But what happens? If the football player becomes lazy and complacent, he isn't going to keep his job. If he could get away with not working out or trying hard, he would. But if he stops working out, fails to study his play book, nor work hard in practice, and so on, he isn't going to make the team. The same thing stands for Christians who fail to struggle against sin in their lives. If we lose our will to

fight, we may lose out on eternal life. If we cave into and fall to the devil, listen to our sinful nature, and follow the path of the world, we'll end up at the door of hell. If we don't fight, if we don't struggle against our sins, then we'll find ourselves on the wrong path. And then in the end it wouldn't matter what we've done in the past, it wouldn't matter what congregation we were a part of, and so on. If we get complacent, if we fail to fight, we'll find ourselves standing **outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'** But Jesus will say to them, **I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evil doers.**

On the other hand, those who do make every effort to enter the narrow gate will enter the narrow gate. Now, this is not to say that we can contribute somehow to our eternal life. We are saved by God's grace, through faith—without any part of our own. But if we don't struggle, if we don't fight, if we don't make every effort than we may lose our faith. Those who fail to struggle will miss out, because they are unbelievers. And those that do struggle against their sinful nature will get in—because those who struggle are believers.

Through faith we will receive all the blessings Christ won for us. Through him and through faith in him we are saved. Not by anything we have ever done. It is because of his work of taking our sins upon himself and suffering for what we have done wrong that we are saved. Not only are our sins removed, but he has also given us his perfect life. Our sins are his, and his perfect life is ours. And so we will live with him forever in heaven.

And there our struggle will be over. For there is no more sin. That was done away with by Christ on the cross. In heaven, the old order of things has passed away. No sin, no sinful desire, no sinners doing sinful things. No sickness or disease, no pain sorrow, or toil. Just eternal bliss with our Lord. Life forever with our God and Savior.

That is what we'll miss out on if we fail to fight against our sinful flesh. If we don't struggle against the temptations of the devil he will get the best of us. If we follow the ways of the world we'll end up on the wrong way to heaven. So let us fight the good fight. Let us put off everything that so easily hinders us. Make every effort, fight, and struggle for what is right and good. It may not be the fun thing to do. And it's certainly not the easy thing to do. But imagine the result.

Entering through the narrow gate. Eternal life with our Savior. That is certainly worth the struggle. Amen.