**MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR**

July 26, 2015

Luke 13:18-30

Key Verse 13:24 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”

As his first declaration to the world, Jesus said, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15) It meant that Jesus himself is the kingdom of God, and that his coming itself is the coming of the kingdom of God to the world. In this passage Jesus asks the question, “What is the kingdom of God like?” Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed that grows into a tree and to yeast that works through a batch of dough. Through these parables, we can learn the character of the kingdom of God. Jesus also teaches us how to enter the kingdom of God. Let’s learn what Jesus means, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”

**First**, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed (18-19). Look at verses 18-19. “Then Jesus asked, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.” Proverbially, the mustard seed is a symbol of smallness. It is the smallest seed among plant seeds (Mt 13:32), but it can grow up to be a big tree. So it is with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God seems to be small, like a mustard seed. But it grows until it becomes bigger than anything else in the world. Luke the historian contrasts the baby Jesus in the manger with Caesar on the throne of the Roman Empire (Lk 2:1-7). This contrast proves historically right. Though the Roman Empire looked mighty and everlasting, it was nothing but a political system. As time passed by, this kingdom dwindled and weakened until it has become just a tourist attraction. But see! The kingdom of God is as small as a mustard seed, but it grows infinitely. When Jesus was born, he could not afford a small room to be born. So he was born in a stable of animals. When he was laid in a manger wrapped in clothes, only a few animals looked at him pitifully. But in him was the life of God; it grew and grew until it has occupied the whole world.

It is important to live with an awareness of the kingdom of God. Many Christians live as though the visible world is the only real world, and seem to have no awareness that we are surrounded by another world which is more real than the world that we come into contact with each day through touch and sight. The kingdom of God is within. Until Jesus comes again, we have to live in two worlds. 2 Corinthians 4:18 says, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” The people of Jesus’ day kept looking for the kingdom of God to come in an outward, visible display of overwhelming power. They thought there would be an overthrow of the foreign oppressors who occupied Israel and a new age of peace. Everyone would see it. It would be unavoidable. But Jesus’ concept of the kingdom was a complete reversal of the thinking of nearly everyone in Israel. His kingdom would not come with an outward display of power and success. It would not be a military victory or a political kingdom. Jesus’ kingdom was an interior kingdom, a kingdom of the heart. Jesus never sat on a king’s throne in this world, but he rules the world today in ways that most kings never dreamed. He rules the world by winning and ruling the hearts of people. He has reigned over more people than any king who has ever lived or ever will live. But the problem for many is that this is an invisible kingdom. It does not display power and prestige. God’s reign is happening without many people even noticing. Jesus said, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21). Here is where we experience the kingdom of God and its power — within. This is where Christ sets up his throne. It is a spiritual kingdom that in the end will conquer all the military and political kingdoms of the world. When Jesus comes again, the kingdom of God will be fully realized. That is why Jesus asked us to pray, “Your kingdom come.” It is the prayer that everyone on earth may accept Jesus’ rule in their hearts.

**Second**, the kingdom of God is like yeast (20-21). Look at verses 20-21. “Again he asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.’” This parable seems similar to the first. But the emphasis is slightly different. The parable of the mustard seed explains how the kingdom of God grows from the smallest beginning to a huge size. The parable of the yeast shows how the kingdom of God spreads. Yeast symbolizes influence. The striking characteristic of yeast is that it spreads until it completely permeates a large batch of dough. In the same way, the influence of the kingdom of God spreads to permeate a society or a nation.

It is not going to be very quick, but over time the yeast is going to permeate the whole amount of dough. Here the dough is the world, and the yeast is the kingdom. It is hidden in the world. If you walk down the street, they are clueless. They don’t know you are heirs to the kingdom of God. They don’t know that you’re going to be co-heirs with Jesus Christ in the glorious kingdom of God. You just don’t look like a transcendent heavenly citizen. You just don’t look like somebody who possesses eternal life. You don’t look like somebody in whom God lives in the presence of his Spirit. It’s not possible for them to discern it. But while they don’t see it, you’re influencing the world through your testimony and your righteousness and the gospel and the work of the Spirit. Lives are being touched, lives are being changed, and just like yeast that permeates, we bubble up and we change what’s around us.

The amazing thing is that God has chosen me and you, and God takes our little, insignificant lives and makes an eternal difference. We are his agents in this world — the yeast in the dough, the seed hidden underground. We are to quietly and faithfully work until his kingdom comes, and his will is done, on earth as it is in heaven. Even if we don’t get any recognition in this world, we work with joy because we know that the day will come when “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

**Third**, make every effort to enter through the narrow door (22-30). As Jesus walked along on his journey to Jerusalem someone asks him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” Perhaps this man had observed that in spite of very large crowds that came to hear Jesus’ preaching and be healed, there were only a few committed disciples. Jesus did not answer directly, but warned him. Look at verse 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.” What does this verse mean when it says that we are to “make every effort”? It is also translated as “strive to enter.” If heaven is a free gift, then what are we striving for? He uses the verb (agonizomai); it is the word that we get our word agonize from. Jesus is not describing that one may work their way into heaven. He is implying that there is a specific route by which one must enter; that is why Jesus mentions a narrow door and sets forth what it is.

The word “narrow” (stenes) is a Greek word that meant “restrictive.” While a person cannot earn entrance into heaven, there are restrictions on who will go to heaven. The narrow door is Jesus Christ, who is the only means of eternal salvation, the only way of entering the kingdom of God. The narrowness of the door suggests an important lesson. If the door is narrow, then few will pass through it, because they must pass through one at a time. We cannot enter the narrow door as a group: “Please let me enter the feast because I belong to UBF or I am a son of a fruitful missionary.” This will not work. We must enter through the narrow door one by one. Many in Israel thought that they were in but they were dead wrong. Having eating fellowship and attending church service will not guarantee our salvation. Do not assume that because you are exposed to the truth, you have it. You do not have the product simply because you are in the store. You have to buy the product to own it. Each one must know Christ personally to be admitted to the kingdom of God. In order to know someone, we have to make great effort. We need to invest time and energy. St. Paul’s life passion and goal was to know Christ. He said in Philippians 3:8, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.” In order to know Christ, he was willing to give up his prestige as a Pharisee and even his life.

However, some will want to enter on their own terms. Not everyone who wants to go to heaven will make it, only those who come on God’s terms. The entrance to heaven is narrow. You must come through the one door, which is Jesus. These are God’s terms and they are the only ones that count. Being sincere is not enough. Being a good person is not enough. Being religious is not enough. Many people think they will be saved because they are good based on tolerance and good works. The following illustration will explain what I mean. Following a Billy Graham crusade in Australia, the newspapers in Melbourne, printed the following reaction. “After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air…I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists that my soul (and everyone else’s) needs saving- whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost. Nor do I feel that I am wallowing the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children of goodness and not sin. If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned.”

There is a time limit on the offer of salvation which the Lord made ominously clear. Look at verses 25-27. “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.’ ‘Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ‘But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come. Away from me, all you evildoers!’” There is coming a day when the wonderful invitation of salvation will be over. For one day the Lord of the house is going to get up from the throne and walk to the front door of his mansion and close the narrow door of salvation. The only opportunities for salvation are in this life. Those who seek to enter late will be told by the Lord, "I do not know you, where you come from” (v. 27) and they will be denied entrance.

While meditating on this passage, I was thinking about why many will try to enter and will not able to. I realized that the door remained the same but they changed. They became too fat to enter through the narrow door. They gained too much due to their sinful life. They no longer fit to the narrow door. They compromised with the world. They loved the things of the world more than Jesus. They are too comfortable in this world. They changed too much and Jesus may not recognize them, saying, “I don’t know you.” They neglected the relationship with Jesus. May God give me a new heart to know Jesus more and have deeper relationship with Jesus.

Look at verse 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. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.” The fortunes will be changed when the door is closed. Those who entered through the wide door and had fun and enjoyed sinful life on earth will weep and gnash their teeth but those who entered through the narrow door will enjoy eternal life with Jesus. They will come from everywhere: east, west, north, and south. Many Jews were excluded but many unexpected Gentiles were included. The robber on the cross who was thought to be the last person to enter the kingdom of God, was the first one who entered simply because he trusted in Jesus. These Gentiles will sit down in the blessed banquet table with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets. The heavenly banquet will be filled with joy and happiness because there will be no more sorrow and sin.

The kingdom of God is already here and operating, and one day it will be here in its fullness. Someone said, “The kingdom of God has never been in trouble and never will be. It is not something that human beings produce or, ultimately, can hinder. We do have an invitation to be a part of it, but if we refuse, we only hurt ourselves.” May God help us to make every effort to be part of this kingdom and expand this kingdom until Jesus comes again.