

Only a Few Saved

Luke 13:22-30

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 21, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

A lot of this passage contains things that are pretty basic and obvious, but it is good to review the obvious from time to time.

First off, you are unable to repent of your sins after you die. The only opportunity that you have for repenting of your sins in this life right now. After you die, you will not be able to repent of your sins. It will be too late then.

The reason is that faith saves. Repentance therefore is to be born of faith. Once you are dead you have enough information about the way that things are that you are no longer living by faith, but rather by sight, as much as disembodied souls see. In other words after you die you know where you will wind up for eternity. If hell is your destination, then you may want to repent, but such repentance is born of experience and not of faith and we all know that faith is what saves you.

Many people believe that God will give you another chance after you die. That is not the case. Our Lord tells us that when the master of the house shuts the door those standing outside are not permitted to come in.

What happens if you are alive when the Lord returns? If you are alive when the Lord returns, you don't die. You are simply changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. But even if you are alive when the Lord returns there is no opportunity to repent of your sins once He comes. We all know that faith saves. Therefore repentance must be born of faith. If a person is never sorry for their sins and then is suddenly sorry for them when Jesus returns, then His repentance is not born of faith, but rather of sight. When Jesus returns in glory every eye will see Him. It will then be obvious to the eye that we should repent of our sins and believe in Jesus, but if we wait until we see Him then our repentance is born of sight and not of faith and we all know that faith saves us. Therefore any so called repenting that happens after Jesus returns is not really repenting at all. It is simply a bunch of people who got caught and want to do something in order to escape what is coming to them.

So contrary to belief in some parts of the world, there is no repenting after Jesus returns. If you have not repented before the Lord returns there will be no opportunity to repent after He comes. If the Lord casts you into hell you cannot get out of it. There is no repenting once you are there.

The master of the house will come and shut the door. Those who are outside when he shuts the door are unable to get in.

So the only opportunity for repentance is now. Once you are dead or the Lord returns it is too late.

Since those who are saved will be few there must be something that the majority of people are doing that is wrong. That brings us to the second basic point that needs to be reviewed. You are not saved by your works or accomplishments.

For some of you who are steeped in the Bible this may come as a surprise to you: most people are trying to obtain salvation by being good. The vast majority of humanity is trying to achieve their salvation by being good. For those human beings who believe in God and believe that there is some kind of life after death, they also believe that they are saved by being good. I have even encountered life long Lutherans who are relying on their good works to save them.

For most of these people the bar they set for salvation is pretty low. For most of these people they have a few set commandments that they are keeping or that they think they are keeping and they think that is sufficient in order to achieve salvation. Such people do not actually believe that God is all that picky. Many people believe that as long as we are honest and treat our neighbors with a fair amount of decency that everything will be ok.

The problem with such thinking is twofold. First off, it does not matter who you are, when you try to achieve salvation by keeping a rule or a set of rules, you make yourself into a hypocrite. No one keeps any rule consistently throughout their life. I have yet to meet a human being that does not break even their own standards of behavior. If a person tells others and himself that if he is honest God will save him is at some point in his life dishonest. Such people are even dishonest where it counts the most with family and with important matters of family.

When a person thinks that some kind of standard of behavior is required in order to be saved such a person starts keeping track of their own behavior and they start keeping track of the behavior of others. They notice when others are not honest or loving or whatever it is that they have set as the standard of salvation. When they notice that others are not keeping the standard of salvation that they have set, they relax their own standards and they start to do the very things that they had said that they would never do. They figured other people were doing it so it must not be too bad if they do the same things. Surely God will think it is all right.

The second problem with believing that certain standards of behavior will save you is that when the bar is set low, you make God less than what He is. If you set the standard of behavior necessary for God to save you whatever standard you set will be less than the standard that God would set Himself. We make our standards for salvation less in order to reassure ourselves that we are saved while at the same time retaining the right to take credit for our salvation. When we do this in order to reassure ourselves of salvation we must make our standards low enough in order for us to keep them. When we lower the standards by which we are saved we make God less holy than He really is.

If God is truly God His standards for saving someone ought to be perfection. In other words if God is going to require a standard of behavior which you must observe in order to be saved, He has to require perfection or He is not much of a God. A god who allows people to get away with things and saves them anyway is not much of a god. Such a god does not have standards that we have to pay attention to. He will save us anyway. Such a god is a permissive parent whose children will grow up and harm themselves.

But in spite of the fact that people are worshipping a god who is not God when they believe that they are saved by their own good works and then lower the standard in their conscience by which they think that God will save them, most people believe that they are saved by being good or by doing good things.

Such people will be surprised when the master of the house shuts the door in their face and says that He does not know them. Such people will protest that they ate and drank in His presence and so they did for some of them even came to the Sacrament of the Altar and some of them will protest that He taught in their streets and so He did for they came to the Divine Service, but since they still relied on their good deeds and accomplishments the master will reply, "I do not know you. Away from Me, you evildoers." Such people will be surprised when people from the north and the south, the east and the west come and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but they themselves are shut out.

There is a great number of people who believe that everyone is going to make it no matter what.

Such people typically are uncertain whether or not there is life after death. But they believe that if there is a better life after this one, that everyone will ultimately get there. Such people believe that it does not much matter if you are a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim. They want us all to coexist together on earth because according to these people we are all going to make it anyway. Such people are called universalists. They think that no matter what every human being except the most vile are going to make it into life everlasting.

In the movie *Ratatouille* Linguini talks about his dead mother and says that, "It's ok, because she believed in heaven and all." I would like to believe that Pixar was aware of Jewish and Christian usage of the term "heaven" as a euphemism for God Himself, but I doubt they had that in mind. It comes across like if you believe that heaven exists at all, you will make it there. It sounds right, but it really isn't.

Such people are not bothered by the divisions within the religions of the world. Sunnis and Shias don't matter much to them. Presbyterians and Lutherans don't matter much to them. Homosexuals vs. heterosexuals doesn't matter much to them. They think that we pretty well all believe the same stuff. They think that we are more alike than different.

Such people are amazed at all of the violence in the world. They truly do not understand it. And because the causes of much violence these days is religious in motivation and these people believe that the religions are unimportant they are ill equipped to deal with the religious violence that we face. In other words they are not living in the real world. And they don't have much of a god either.

If there is a God, wouldn't it make sense that He would demand all worship and all loyalty? If He did not, He would not be much of a god, now would he? If there is a God, wouldn't He insist that He alone had it right and that everyone that opposed Him had it wrong? If he doesn't, then he isn't much of a god.

But there are people who believe this. Such people are in control of our academic environment here in the United States. They preach this stuff from the pulpit of the lecture hall in our public schools. They are supported by our tax dollars. They claim that religion is simply the product of the evolution of human thought about things metaphysical. Therefore the gods are not real. They are simply projections of our emotional needs. They are projections of our dead parents so that we can keep them with us. According to these people the gods are things that we have made up for ourselves to make ourselves feel better. Such people preach this stuff to your children until your children believe it also and quit attending the Divine Service and quit receiving the forgiveness of their sins. Such people worship a nothing and by worshipping a nothing they are in fact worshipping themselves for they are left with no one to rescue them and to save them except themselves. And they struggle and fight and chafe against death and death still overtakes them.

Such people will be surprised when they rise from the dead on the last day and behold the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. They will realize then that He did rise from the dead. They will find out too late that the holy and blessed apostles knew what they were talking about when they spoke about Jesus from Nazareth. They will be surprised to find that He is the master of the house and there is no other house. They will be surprised to find out that the Lord had taught in their streets and unlike the people who tried to save themselves by their good deeds they did not even know that much.

They will be surprised to find out that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were real people and not the product of evolutionary religious thought. They will be surprised to find out that there were prophets who did preach the books the bear their names. They will be surprised to find out that these people whom they insisted did not exist, actually do exist, and on the last day they will find them reclining with Jesus in the Kingdom of God. And they themselves will be shut out.

So when our Lord says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door," He is talking about Himself. Many are walking on the road of universalism or on the road of doing good deeds. Neither of these roads is the narrow one because neither of these roads is Jesus.

In His Name. Amen.