

LUKE 13 - STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE

Ps. 93: 1 – 4

Ps. 37: 12, 13, 15

Ps. 19: 4 – 6

Ps. 119: 1 – 3

Ps. 39: 1, 13

Scripture reading: Mt. 7: 13 – 27; Luke 13: 22 – 30;

Text: Luke 13: 23, 24

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What does it mean to walk on the narrow road?

The Lord teaches us in all of Scripture that we have to **keep** the way of the Lord, by walking according to His precepts. When the people of Israel transgressed the commandments of the Lord, we often find this expression: “they have turned aside from the way which I commanded them”.

Scripture describes “the way of the LORD” as a way of obedience to His Word.

When Israel obeyed God’s commandments, they kept the way of the Lord, when they transgressed the commandments, they departed from the way which the Lord commanded them to walk. The way of the Lord is the good way, the right way, the way of life.

If anyone does not walk in the way of the Lord, then he is walking “his own way”: the way of death.

It is clear that the way of the Lord is the way that is spelled out to us in God’s commandments, and in all of Scripture. The way of the Lord is the way that has been revealed to us in Scripture.

It is the way of truth:

“Teach me **Your way**, O LORD; I will walk in **Your truth...**” – Ps. 86: 11

To walk in the way of the Lord is to walk in His truth, keeping His commandments, walking in the fear of His Name. The way of the Lord is a way of holiness and purity.

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!” – Ps. 119: 1

Now, Scripture also tells us that this way of the Lord is a straight way, and that those who walk on it have to walk straight, without turning to the right or to the left.

“You shall not **add** to the word which I command you, nor **take** from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which He commanded you” – Deut. 4: 2

And again He says:

“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” – Deut. 12: 32.

Now, it never happened that Israel took the Book of Moses and tore some pieces out; and it never happened that they sat down and wrote a few chapters of their own fancy and added

that to the Book of Moses. But, it did happen, and it happened even often, that they took away and added to the Word of the Lord in their daily walk of life – bending the way either to the right or to the left.

You may have a complete Bible, while some parts of it have been deleted from your daily walk of life. Or you may acknowledge all 66 books of the canon as the Word of God, and nothing more, but, in your daily walk of life add your own principles and rules to it. Taking away from the Lord's Word, or adding to it, is not something that happens only on paper, but also in the way you live.

In our own day it often happens by means of a new hermeneutics. Hermeneutics has to do with the way in which you interpret Scripture.

Is the book Genesis true history, or is it simply a parable?

Does the law of God still apply to us, or has it become outdated?

These kinds of questions are today very much in the foreground. People are looking for different ways of interpreting Scripture, so that the Scriptures may be adjusted and conformed to our own time and to our own desires; yes, so that the Scriptures may say what men would like it to say.

And so, by providing new and different interpretations of Scripture, which are foreign to Scripture itself, men are actually adding and taking away from Scripture as they please.

But it is not all so complicated. The sinful nature of man has not changed. By nature we all tend to deviate from God's Word. We find this war raging even in our own hearts.

Now, to illustrate how carefully we have to stick to the Word of God, the LORD compared His instructions to a road. His instructions are a narrow road. If you want to stay on this road, then you have to be very careful not to deviate to the right or to the left.

The way of life is a narrow road.

We have to take great care that we obey the Word of the Lord exactly in the way that He told us, not giving it a twist to the right, or a bend to the left.

“...you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” – Deut. 5: 32

After the death of Moses the LORD also spoke to Joshua, saying:

“...be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go” – Joshua 1: 7.

These words are repeated many times over: be careful to obey everything that the Lord has told you; ***do not turn to the right or to the left***. The road is straight and narrow.

Now, these words which we find so often in the Old Testament are also repeated and confirmed in the New Testament. The apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians:

“See then that you walk circumspectly...” – Eph. 5: 15.

The Greek word which our translation translated “circumspectly” could also be translated “strictly” or “accurately”: “See then that you walk **strictly/accurately...**”

Christian freedom does not mean that we have now more room in the New Testament to walk as we like. The road has not become broader in the New Testament. The road is still just as narrow as in the Old Testament. Our feet may still not turn to the right or to the left. We still have to walk on this road circumspectly, strictly, accurately, taking great care lest we deviate from the Word of the Lord, lest we add or take away.

Christian freedom is not the same as lawlessness. We have been liberated in order that we may walk strictly and carefully according to all that the Lord has commanded us. Our liberation is liberation **from** sin, not **unto** sin.

If anyone confuses strict and careful obedience with Pharisee-ism, then such a person is still ignorant of the new life in Christ.

While the Christian life has nothing to do with Pharisee-ism, our new life in Christ is indeed a life of **strict** and **careful** obedience to God's law. The road has not become broader or easier in the New Testament, as some imagine.

There is only **one** way of life, and only **one** way to walk on it: carefully, accurately, strictly – not giving it a twist to the right or a bend to the left. If our feet do not walk straight, we are in no time off the road.

Yes, the road to life is straight and narrow.

Our Lord Jesus repeats and confirms the same teaching here in our text.

I will now proclaim God's Word to you with the theme:

Strive to enter through the narrow gate.

We will note...

1. That few will be saved
2. That there is a struggle to enter the kingdom
3. That many will seek to enter, but will not be able

In the first place we note that...

Few will be saved

While our Lord Jesus went through the cities and villages teaching, journeying toward Jerusalem, someone asked Him this question:

“Lord, are there few who are saved?”

And the Lord’s answered them:

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” – verse 24.

Already in the Old Testament we read that few people were saved and that most people perished in unbelief.

In the days of Noah only Noah and his family were saved. For the rest: all men perished under the wrath of God.

Later on we read of Sodom and Gomorrah. In these two large cities, only Lot and his family found grace, and the rest all perished under the terrible wrath of God.

The Lord called Abraham and his family, and the rest of the nations He left to themselves for thousands of years. He revealed Himself only to one little nation and showed them His salvation. The rest of the world was without God and without hope.

But even when we turn to Israel, the chosen nation of the LORD, we see that most of Israel also perished in unbelief.

The Lord had no pleasure in most of them and killed them in the desert – 1 Cor. 10: 1 – 5. Most of Israel did not obey the Lord and did not believe the gospel (Hebr. 3: 16 – 4: 3).

Most of Israel perished in unbelief and disobedience.

Of those whom the LORD delivered from Egypt, who saw all His wonders of redemption, He even says: "...I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest..." (Hebr. 4:3).

Of all the people of Israel above 20 years who were delivered from Egypt, only **two** were allowed to enter the land of promise: Joshua and Caleb.

When we look at the rest of the history, then we hear the prophet Isaiah saying that no one believed his preaching, the preaching of the gospel. He complains about **Israel's** unbelief (Isaiah 53: 1 and many other places).

The prophets of the Lord repeated over and over again that only **a remnant** will be saved – only a very **small** remnant.

Then we don't even mention the multitude of heathen nations who all perished without hope and without God. Even **within** the chosen people of God, the picture looks sombre.

Lord, are there few who are saved?

There is a reason for this question being asked. Especially here in our text, because: just listen what Jesus is teaching. He teaches in the synagogues and He goes through all the towns preaching the gospel of the kingdom, saying things like this: if you don't hate your own life and deny yourself, you cannot follow Me and will not be saved. And how many people are there who will actually do such a thing as to deny himself?

The people of the kingdom turn the other cheek when they are slapped through the face, and who show love to their enemies. They are quick to forgive. They are persecuted for their faithfulness. They do not gather earthly treasures for themselves. They are totally different from the rest of mankind. Their lives shine like light in a dark world.

But – and here comes the problem – many people who call themselves Christian **don't** live this way. Many profess to be followers of Christ, but do not walk on the way that He prescribes.

Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?

While Christ is busy with His teaching a man comes and puts this question to Him.

Lord, we have listened to your teaching, but we do not see many people who live in the way that **You** prescribe. Even **the leaders** of the covenant people do not live this way.

Do we then understand You correctly that only a few will enter the kingdom?

And then follows the answer:

“Strive to enter through the **narrow** gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able”.

The Lord calls the entrance to the kingdom of heaven a narrow gate. It is called narrow because there are not many who enter through it, **and** because it is not easy to enter through it. We see this clearly when we compare the parallel passage in Matthew 7.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are **many** who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are **few** who find it”.

Many who will be lost; **few** who will be saved.

Yes, the Lord made it clear to us that **most** people will be lost.

It is a **hard struggle** for each one who wants to enter.

Many who **thought** that they were children of God, and thought that they will easily enter, will be cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Great multitudes came to listen to the teaching of Christ, but most of the hearers were only hearers, building on sand.

If we count together all who are saved throughout all the centuries, then it will of course be a very large multitude; but ***in comparison*** with the enormous multitude that will perish eternally, only a ***few*** will be saved.

Dear congregation, we need to know this, so that we may not learn to follow the crowd.

“You shall not follow a crowd to do evil...” - Ex. 23:2

The Lord said that to His covenant people. Even within the covenant people, even within the church, we may not follow the majority if the majority is going the wrong way. And it applies also to us in the New Testament.

Even if many church members will live in a certain way or do certain things, it does not mean that you may also live like that or do the same.

Don't follow the majority just because they are the majority. Don't do something because everyone else does it.

Our lives should be directed by God's law even when everybody around us does differently. Even if everyone laughs at you, and make jokes about you, and shake their heads because you are so narrow-minded, because you are walking so narrowly. Even in such circumstances you have no choice, because the road that leads to life ***is*** narrow and straight; and so is the gate. There is no room on it, or in it, to turn to the right or to the left.

On the Day of Judgment even many church members will be excluded from the kingdom of God because they **did** turn to the right or to the left, or thought that the road was a little bit broader.

We look at that in our second point, that...

There is a struggle to enter through the narrow gate

The Greek word which is translated here with “strive” means “struggle”, “fight”, or it can also be used for something like a wrestling match where someone has to exert himself using all his power. It is a strong word. **Fight** with all your might! **Struggle!** **Strive to enter!**

In Hebr. 12:1 the Lord tells us to run with endurance the race that is set before us. And then He continues, and says:

“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” – (verse 4).

We all know this struggle striving against our own sin and the temptations of the world and the snares of Satan. If anyone does not know this struggle to walk carefully according to all God’s commandments, if anyone is not fleeing from sin and the temptations of this world, and **not** striving to stay on the narrow road, then he has already left the narrow road. Such a person will not enter the narrow gate.

There is no such thing as an easy Christian life.

Tribulation, persecution, self-denial, crucifying our own sinful desires – that is the normal Christian life.

If anyone would say: “No, I don’t think so. **I** don’t have to strive or to fight, exerting myself, to enter the kingdom, because **Christ** won the battle **for** me already, therefore **I** don’t have to **strive** to enter through the narrow gate!”, then such a person is totally deceived.

Because it is indeed true that Christ has already won the victory, and we in Him; it is true that we are saved only by **His** righteousness, and not at all by our own righteousness. But it is **just** as true that we have to strive with all our might to enter the kingdom of God. Whoever does not **strive** to enter, will certainly **not** enter. If anyone does not strive to enter, he simply does not have a true faith.

How then are we to understand this? How do we understand it that our salvation is completely **God's** work, but that we, at the same time, still have to **strive** and **exert** ourselves with all our might to enter into the kingdom?

Scripture puts it so clearly to us in Phil. 2: 12, 13:

“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”.

We have to work out our own salvation **with fear and trembling**, for this very reason: that it is **God** who works all in us to do His will.

It doesn't make sense to us, does it? In our minds it is either God who does it, or we who do it. But the Bible doesn't know of any tension between God's sovereign grace and our responsibility. Scripture says: **You** have to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **because** it is God who works in you!

You have to do it, because God does it.

Scripture doesn't know any tension between God's sovereign grace and our responsibility. And if anyone sees a tension between the two, then it is a false tension.

The problem comes in when someone tries to make this a bit more acceptable to the human mind and human logic. And the result is time and again that either God's sovereign grace falls away, or our responsibility falls away; because: to our mind the two just don't fit together.

The Lord does everything, **He** saves us; and we stay 100% responsible for our deeds, and 100% responsible to strive with all our might to enter the kingdom.

Yes, we are 100% responsible to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

It is God who saves us, but He does not save us by taking away our responsibility. No, He makes His dwelling in us and renews us in such a way that **we** are from now on heartily willing and ready to live for Him and exert ourselves to fight the good fight of faith.

Dear congregation, it is a struggle in which we all stumble often. We are not being saved because we are **in ourselves** holy and without sin. Only in Christ we are holy, only in Him we are pure. As far as we ourselves are concerned we have a sinful nature against which we have to strive our whole life long. In ourselves we are not perfect yet. And for this very reason we still have a fight to fight crucifying our old nature from day to day, applying self-discipline, and self-denial. As the Lord also commands us:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” – Col. 3:5.

Put to death!

He doesn't say that to heathens who still have to be converted, He says it to the congregation.

“...if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” – Rom. 8:13.

If the Spirit of God dwells in us, then we are also busy putting to death the deeds of our flesh. Then we flee from the temptations of this world, and take great care to walk exactly as the Lord has commanded us.

Forget about the multitudes who call themselves Christian while they live like the world. Don't be deceived by them. Because: not everyone who says Lord!, Lord!, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who **does** the will of the Father.

The good fight of faith is a struggle in which we have to take up our cross every day following Christ, a way on which we have to deny ourselves, a way which leads to your own crucifixion and death, in order that Christ may live in us.

Dear congregation, do not be deceived by a false gospel which says that everything will automatically go well in your life because you are baptized, and because you attend the church services.

No, strive with all your might to enter through the narrow gate, trusting in the Lord that He will grant you also the strength to do so. Give **everything** in the struggle, trusting the Lord, trusting His promises. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, exactly **because** you trust that it is God who works in you.

Brothers and sisters, do you indeed live this way striving against sin and fleeing from it?

Do you watch programs on TV in which the Name of the Lord is blasphemed; do you watch the violence and the fornication shown on the screen?

The one who listens to the blasphemy, is himself also a blasphemer.

The one who watches the violence, becomes guilty of the same.

The one who watches the fornication, has become a fornicator himself.

If it is a temptation for you to watch such movies, then you may not allow a TV in your house. Or if it is a temptation for your children to watch such movies, then you surely have to throw the TV out.

You are **not** allowed to put your soul or the souls of your children in danger. Remove then the idol and throw it out of your house, so that you and your house may walk holy with your God. Fill your mind with the Word of the Lord, and not with the sewerage of this world.

You shall not bring an abomination into your house (Deut. 7:26).

When you put on that TV, it is most of the time like a sewerage pipe that you open to fill your house with the sewerage of this world. Leave it on, and you will soon start to think and to act in the same way!

There are much more that we will have to do than throwing TV's out. There are programs that protect your computer from websites that contain pornography.

There are free programs, such as "OpenDNS", that prevents you from entering the wrong sites. Such a protection-program should be installed on your computer for the sake of your soul, and for the sake of the souls of your children.

There are many more ways in which we have to watch out, lest we conform to this world and defile ourselves with the practices of this world.

We cannot befriend the world. You may not make worldly people your personal friends.

Neither may you enjoy the company of scoffers.

But our watchfulness should not only be towards the world outside. We have to be watchful even in the church.

Even when we walk into a Christian bookshop, not every so-called Christian book is **necessarily** good reading material.

And not everything that is Free Reformed is **necessarily** good.

Yes, we have to be alert all the time. Even within the churches we may not think that everything is okay, for we can easily exchange the narrow road for one that becomes broader and broader as we continue.

We have to be alert all the time, for the road *is* narrow.

And to the very end of the ages the way of life will remain narrow.

When something is imported into the churches, which has previously been viewed to be harmful, the argument that you hear is often this: **but everyone does it these days! We are living in different times, you know!**

Yes, we may be living in different times, but the way of life has not changed.

Brothers and sisters, the *right* way is still as narrow as before. If the road *seems* to become broader, know for sure that it is the wrong way.

By nature we try to make the narrow road just a little bit broader – a bit broader here, and a bit broader there, until it becomes quite comfortable. In the end we think and speak and dress and do as the world; until the road is broad enough for everything that the world offers.

“Be very careful, then, how you live...” – Eph. 5: 15.

Yes, if you live carefully not departing to the left or to the right, people will call you narrow-minded. But have no choice, for there is only *one* way that leads to life: a narrow one! And there is only one way to walk on it: walking carefully, strictly, exactly as the Lord has said.

Let us not sit in the company of scoffers, but let us meditate on the law of the Lord day and night.

Dear congregation, do you still know this to be part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that He saved us and called us to live holy lives, and to *flee* from the defilement of this world, and that we have to walk circumspectly and carefully according to His commandments, without turning to the right or to the left?

Yes, the road is narrow, because the gate is narrow.

We note that in the third place.

Many will seek to enter, but will not be able

Only those who walked on the narrow road, will enter the narrow gate.

But who are the *many* who will seek to enter and will not be able to enter?

When we read further, Christ gives the answer. He uses a parable:

“When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying: ‘Lord, Lord, open for us’, He will answer and say to you: ‘I do not know you, where you are from’, then you will begin to say: ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’. But He will say: ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity’. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out” – verses 25 – 28.

When we look at the context, we see that Jesus was speaking to the Jews. He is teaching in the synagogues and in the cities and towns on His way to Jerusalem. These Jews reckoned themselves to be children of the kingdom, **because** they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! And did they not all receive the sign and seal of the covenant?

God has chosen them to be His people, did He not?

Yes, all the promises of the Lord were made to **them**.

And for that reason they reckoned that it is obvious that **they** will inherit the kingdom.

But the Lord makes it clear to them that many of the covenant children will be cast out into the outer darkness. They were so privileged to hear the gospel, but did not obey. They were hearers only, building on sand.

Brothers and sisters, **we** are the covenant people of the Lord. Christ has made the new covenant with us and sealed it with His blood. Yes, the church of the New Testament is the special people of the Lord. And therefore these words are also for us. We who grew up in the covenant, we who grew up in the church – the exhortation is especially for us.

Don't think that you will enter the kingdom of God just because you are a member of the church and are called a Christian, if you do not also **live** according to the commandments of the Lord.

Because many, yes, many church members, many covenant children, will stand one day before a closed door, calling: Lord!, Lord! Open for us, we know You!, and will be sent away because the Bible was only for Sundays and for men's clubs, and youth clubs, but the rest of the week was for the world and its desires.

Therefore He calls them "workers of iniquity", that is: transgressors of His law.

The narrow road is about being a doer of the Word, and not only a hearer, deceiving ourselves. It is about building on the rock, and not building on sand, it is about listening carefully to the Lord's instructions, not departing from it to the left or to the right.

Let us not look at the crowd who call themselves Christian, but do not live according to God's commandments. If anyone is not striving with all his might to stay on the narrow road, he will also not be able to enter through the narrow gate.

We will not be saved just because we were church members and knew the doctrine and teachings of Christ, or just because we listened to the sermons as one would listen to a piece of music without reacting to it.

This exhortation of Christ is a warning directed especially to His church. **Strive** to enter through the narrow gate, because many will try to enter but not be able.

There is no such thing as an easy going Christian. There is no such thing as an easy church, or comfortable church-life. It does not exist in the dictionary of the kingdom.

Let us also note the last words of this passage:

“They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (: 29, 30).

When the marriage feast of the Lamb has come, a multitude will sit down at the table from every tribe and nation and tongue – from north, south, east and west.

But those covenant people who boasted of their heritage without living according to God's Word, they will be cast out.

The Jews thought that they were the first, and that the heathens were the last. And it was true also, because God showed His grace and mercy to Israel first, and it was many centuries later before He revealed the gospel also to the heathens.

His covenant was first only with Israel.

But most of them rejected Christ, and therefore they will be last. And the heathens who were far from God came to repent and believe, therefore they will be first.

The Lord measures us according to His Word, and not according to the opinions of men.

Therefore we must not seek the approval of men, or even the approval of our friends, but we have to ask: What is the will of the Lord? – and walk in it.

Let us not measure ourselves to other people, but to God's Word only.

Don't look for big numbers to follow the crowd. Don't look around you to see whether the majority is following.

If we want to follow Christ, it is often a lonely road despised by men.

Forget about the crowds who call themselves Christian, but who live like the world. Don't be deceived.

Yes, it is never easy to stand alone. Which persecution hurts the most? Is it not when it comes from false brethren from within the church? Yes, the road may sometimes be very lonely, when all around you are shaking their heads. He thinks too black and white, they say. He must just become a bit more relaxed! He takes life too seriously. He seems to be a square in a round world. When this kind of talk comes from your own brothers and sisters in the church, then the road may seem just too narrow!

But, brothers and sisters, let us patiently endure. Do not give up; trust in the Lord who will vindicate you.

Don't look around you to see whether we are many. Don't count the crowd.

There are many who live light-hearted and carefree. Don't be deceived by such a profession of Christianity.

Let us walk carefully according to the Word of the Lord, without twisting it to the right or bending it to the left.

We do not fight the battle like people who are uncertain. We wage the war trusting in Christ. In Him we have everlasting life. **He** is our comfort and our trust. Therefore we fight the good fight of faith all the more as we trust in Christ alone.

If we trust that He will keep us and grant us the strength to endure, let us then also diligently ask it from Him in prayer: "Lord, preserve us, help us".

While we are indeed but a few on the narrow road, let us also encourage one another in the Lord, exhorting one another to persevere on the straight and the narrow.

The Lord will hear our prayers and keep us.

Amen.

