

INTRO - One of my brothers was in the hospital a couple of years ago in a diabetic coma. His blood sugar had been up to 700. He was lucky to be alive. When we talked to him he told us what the doctor said, but then gave reasons he thought the doctor was wrong, and why he would do what he thought. I told him, and I let his daughters hear. "Your mind is not clear. Your health has you thinking unclearly. You need to listen to your doctor. Pay attention to your doctor. He is trying to save your life."

The good news is that ultimately, with help, my brother followed the doctor. He got some better, and is now possibly obsessive about his diet. If he had not listened, I believe he was on the way to his death. I shared my warning because I wanted my brother to live.

I. So, What does Jesus mean when he speaks in today's Gospel lesson, <sup>24</sup>**"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.**

A. The Greek word for strive can also be translated, "compete in a contest." Is Jesus warning, "Work harder to obey God?"

1. Jesus does want those people, and He does want us to strive to enter through the narrow door. BUT, He is NOT saying work harder.

2. Actually, that is what the Pharisees thought. They knew the past failure of their people, and their disobedience and idolatry, so they committed themselves even more to living holy lives. That is why they are called the Hasadim, the set apart ones, the holy ones. But, were the Pharisees following God, or trusting their own righteousness, their own effort?

3. Some forms of Christianity call people to work harder to keep God's law. Sometimes they think they are better than other Christians. But trusting ourselves rather than trusting God only makes people proud, self-righteous.

B. Spiritual pride is a problem which leads people away from God, unfortunately.

1. Think of what John the Baptist taught in Matthew 3 about the religious leaders through John, who thought his call to repentance could not mean them. They were the chosen children of Abraham. <sup>9</sup> **And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.** <sup>10</sup> **Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** Pride is a problem, leading them to judgment..

2. Think about the 10 lepers. The only one who returned to thank Jesus was a Samaritan. The others, the Jewish lepers, saw themselves as chosen and did not feel they needed to say thanks. Pride is a problem. Pride trusts self, NOT God!

C. Jesus also teaches in today's lesson, <sup>26</sup>**Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.'** <sup>27</sup>**But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'**

1. Do you realize Jesus is talking to church people, who are missing the mark?
2. Working harder and trusting SELF is NOT the answer.
3. This all sounds like bad news, doesn't it? Like condemnation? Like law?

II. My brother was trying to reason, trying to think. He was focusing on his thoughts. He probably should have been focusing on his illness, his problems. Soooo, if Jesus isn't saying work harder, then what is He saying? The key is in the last verse of this lesson. <sup>30</sup>**And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."**

A. First, Jesus wanted the people to strive to be honest with themselves, to know their shortcomings, to know their sin. Jesus wanted them to know what they deserved from the Almighty, the judge

1. This is humility, sorrow for sin, repentance, not pride.
2. That is how **some are last who will be first**, the humility of repentance.

B. Part of this humility also then means not trusting ourselves, our work, our righteousness, but to know that God acts in grace

1. This means not means not trusting ourselves, but knowing that God provides in love.
2. This means not means not trusting ourselves, but knowing that God provides in Jesus.
3. Those who trust themselves, who live in pride, are the **first who will be last**.
4. Those who trust God to deal with their failure by the death of Jesus who died for us, by the resurrection of Jesus which saves us, are the **last who will be first**.

III. This reading can sound troubling, like condemnation, like bad news. But ultimately Jesus gives the surprise of good news, of gospel, of salvation in Jesus.

A. Remember Jesus' words

1. **behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”**

2. Those who are last, who know their failings, who know the grace of God and trust HIM, they will be first, they will enter the kingdom of God.

B. The surprise is that we are saved by Jesus, not ourselves. As God teaches in Ephesians 2:8, **We are saved by grace through faith, not BY works.**

1. When Jesus calls us to strive to enter, *because* he says some who are last will be first, He is calling us not to self righteousness but to honest repentance, and to trusting faith.

2. The surprising Good news is that, as Jesus says to Zacchaeus, **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”**

C. Today’s lesson is a call from Jesus to be honest and know our failure and weakness.

1. Today’s lesson is what Jesus began preaching in Mark 1:15, **“Repent and believe the good news.**

2. Then you are among **last who will be first**, not the proud **first who will be last.”**

CONCLUSION - Thankfully my brother humbled himself. He is still somewhat stubborn, and thinks he has the answers. My wife tells his daughters, “Have you seen how his family lives? They’re all stubborn.” Hmmm. My brother stopped listening to his own wisdom, and trusted the doctor. He eats better, he lost weight, he is walking now, and driving again. We are surprised at the good news of his somewhat healthy self.

When we have the humility to know our sin, to admit we are last, to trust Jesus, not ourselves we have a surprise. By grace we are saved. **Strive to enter.** Be honest with your failings, Trust God’s love and grace in Jesus! **behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”**

### **Gospel - Luke 13:22–30**

<sup>22</sup>[Jesus] went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, <sup>24</sup>“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. <sup>25</sup>When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ <sup>26</sup>Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught

in our streets.’<sup>27</sup> But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’<sup>28</sup> In that place 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 but you yourselves cast out.<sup>29</sup> And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.<sup>30</sup> And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”