

“He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”

Perhaps that’s the question we ask ourselves. In a country where more and more churches close their doors, in a world where more and more people are selecting no religious affiliation on religious preference surveys. Who among us has an extended family where every single person that shares our last name is a faithful Christ follower?

There’s this whole messy ball of questions we don’t like asking. “Why so few, God?” “Why some and not others?” “Why not my cousin? My brother? My kid?”

Jesus answers the question, and we’re not so sure the answer helps. **““Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”** Will those who are saved be few? It seems the answer is yes.

As we examine our text, I have a yardstick to illustrate the three types of people we encounter in our text. First, the question asker. 3. The multitude of the best and brightest use the yardstick to scoff at the door's dimensions.

The question askers hold the yardstick at an arm’s length and measure the door. According to my measurement, that set of double doors is only three inches wide. Who could possibly go through those doors! What a joke!

These are the kinds of people who use their minds to make excuses not to strive to enter the narrow door. These are the atheists and agnostics: those who don’t believe there is a god and those who don’t know either way. Atheists like Richard Dawkins work to mock Christianity and try to prove it is ridiculous.

“And someone said to [Jesus], “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”” In my sophomore year of college, I remember attending a debate between a Christian and an atheist. Afterwards I got into a discussion with my agnostic friends. One of my friends asked the question, “What about people in Africa who have never heard the Gospel?” I didn’t have an answer and that shut the conversation down.

If the yardstick is the saving message of Jesus Christ coming to die for the forgiveness of sinners, then the so called best and brightest in our age take this message and put it in the hot seat. They say, “The door’s too narrow to walk through!” “How can I measure anything, this yardstick is in inches, not centimeters!” “I won’t use this wooden yardstick because you had to kill a tree to get it.”

But the best and brightest miss the point. The message of Christianity isn’t for simply thinking about. It isn’t a specimen to be put under a microscope. Those who are wise in the world’s eyes lack the crucial thing: perspective. God is God

and we aren't. The world isn't centered around you. The reason that door is so narrow is because you're standing across the room from it.

There's a second group, 2. The multitude of the proud assume the yardstick is the ticket and wait for their limo. Our account continues. **“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.’”**

There are those who receive the yardstick of Christianity and then assume that's it's simply a list of ideas about which you need to agree. No need to actually walk to the door. Their ride is coming in no time. No need to take the faith seriously, their ticket was punched.

Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are real gifts from God which impart grace and forgiveness to those who trust in Jesus. But you abuse the gifts of God if you simply treat them as a ticket to heaven with no regard to your spiritual well-being. Confirmation and Church membership are wonderful opportunities to confess to the world your saving faith in Christ. They are not a replacement for a living relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

A real litmus test is this. Think of the statement: “Because of X, I no longer need to pray, attend worship, or read the Bible.” What is the X for you? Because I was baptized? Because I was confirmed? Because I hold membership at Faith Lutheran Church? Again, all of these are good things, but if they are used as excuses for indifference and negligence towards spiritual things, we need to take Jesus' warning in this text to heart.

Because we don't want others to be locked outside the narrow door, we lovingly admonish them to make use of the gifts God has given them. Baptism is a call to live a life of dying to sin and rising again to new life. The Lord's Supper is a lifeline in a world filled with spiritual forces that would swallow you whole. God's Word is a lamp that lights the way to heaven. Confirmation and Church Membership are promises you make by the help of God that the Church can use to pull you back when you're tottering over the edge.

We have a loving duty to warn church members, family, and friends that habitual, chronic neglect of God's Word and Sacrament delivered in public worship runs the risk of making shipwreck of faith. We want nobody to be caught outside the doors with Christ saying, **“I do not know where you come from.”** The proud think the yardstick is the ticket yet take no steps to strive to enter the narrow door.

1. The faithful few use the yardstick to measure their height and then follow Jesus' call. Our text ends with good news. **“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be**

last.” It may be that few will be saved, but there will be many people you don’t expect reclining at table in the Kingdom of God.

The yardstick is not for measuring the door from across the room. It’s not a ticket that will get you free entrance apart from faith in Christ. The Message of Christianity is for measuring yourself and realizing you don’t measure up. “Why so few?” If it were up to your own skills and holiness, you wouldn’t be part of the few entering through the narrow door! We fail to keep God’s law and we sin daily and need forgiveness.

Yet Christianity is about believing that Christ has measured up for you. He has entered the narrow door for you. He has lived the perfect life for you, taking on your sins on the cross and giving you His righteousness. He has risen again to prove that death has no power over Him and neither does it have power over you in Him!

For the first two categories, the best and brightest who mock Christianity and the proud who think God’s got to let them into heaven because they’re just so great, in both cases, they’re using what they know about Christianity as an excuse to stay put and not change.

For my friend who asked about the people in Africa who haven’t heard the Gospel, he used that as an excuse not to receive the Gospel promises of a new life in Christ. Besides, the place where the Church is booming is indeed Africa. The church member who has grown indifferent to Jesus consoles herself with the fact that she was confirmed years ago. She refuses to see the need to take hold of the Gospel promises today.

There’s another use for this yardstick. It’s a walking stick. The earliest name for Christianity was the Way. Indeed, Christianity is a lifestyle and shapes the way we live. We find that as Christ calls us to follow Him, the Holy Spirit puts one foot in front of the other and all of a sudden that three-inch door grows bigger.

Jesus isn’t calling you to write a doctoral dissertation. He isn’t calling you to sign a membership slip and fade away into obscurity. He is calling you to a life of following Him in the places He promises to be: namely in prayer, in the Bible, in the Lord’s Supper, and in the fellowship of other Christians.

“Will those saved be so few?” **JESUS CALLS US NOT TO MEASURE THE DOOR, BUT TO STRIVE TO ENTER IT BY FAITH.** Throw away all excuses and believe the Gospel which sets your feet on a path through the narrow door. As you approach those heavenly gates, you’ll realize that it’s bigger on the inside. There will be plenty of people from all time and space who have been called to eternal life in Christ Jesus—even those you least expect. Let it be said of all of us, **“I have striven the good strive, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** Amen!