

Luke 13:22–30: ²²[Jesus] went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, ²⁴“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵When 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.’ ²⁶Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ ²⁸In 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. ²⁹And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Bad News or Good News

INTRODUCTION

When someone says, “I have good news and I have bad news. What would you like to hear first?” People usually say, “The bad news.” There’s a guy in the hospital with two severely broken legs. The nurse comes in and tells him that there’s good news and bad news. Of course, the guy asks for the bad news first. The nurse says, “We can’t save your legs.” Then the guy says, “What’s the good news?” The nurse replies, “The guy beside you wants to buy your tennis shoes.”

Then there’s John and his friend George. They loved to go golfing together every Saturday. But one day, John returned home completely exhausted and plopped down in his easy chair. His wife was quite concerned since he was more exhausted than usual after his Saturday golf game. She asked him if something went wrong with the game. He said, “Well, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I had my best game in years. As a matter of fact, I started out the first three holes at 4 under par, including a hole-in-two on the 3rd.” “So, what’s the bad

news,” she asked. “Well, George had a heart attack and died on the 4th hole.” “What!? Are you exhausted from trying to save him?” “No, honey,” he said. “It was quick and there was nothing anyone could’ve done. BUT AFTER THAT, IT WAS JUST HIT THE BALL, DRAG GEORGE, HIT THE BALL, DRAG GEORGE...”

Good and bad news may be a matter of perspective. What may be bad news for some is good news for others. In today’s Gospel reading, this question is posed to our Lord, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” This man may very well have been looking for a good news kind of answer. This guy probably thought heaven was an exclusive country club reserved for the descendants of Abraham—no more pesky Gentiles to mess things up—just a place for the elite keepers of the Law of Moses. If someone gave you a free membership to an exclusive country club or a vacation paradise, wouldn’t you consider that, “good news”?

But Jesus didn’t tell Him what I’m sure his ears were itching to hear. Instead, Jesus said, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” Jesus more or less said,

“I HAVE BAD NEWS FOR YOU—IT ISN’T EASY TO GET INTO HEAVEN, AND THE DOOR IS NARROW, AND NOT EVERYONE WHO TRIES TO GET IN WILL GET IN. BUT I HAVE GOOD NEWS, TOO—I AM THE DOOR TO HEAVEN, I HAVE COME TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST, AND I INVITE PEOPLE FROM FAR AND WIDE TO ENTER THROUGH ME!”

I. Strive to Enter the Narrow Door.

Last May Candace and I went to Blake’s graduation at Riverton High School. After the ceremony, everyone jammed into the lobby of the school and it was a struggle to get out the doors and onto the sidewalk.

Jesus says it isn't easy to be a Christian—you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. In a world that values ease and convenience, that's bad news. We're surrounded by all kinds of things that make life easier—from washing machines to email, from garage door openers to TV remotes. I'm reminded of the story of the young woman who came home from school hungry. Her mom told her to go downstairs and get a can of soup and heat it up. So she did. She came upstairs with the can and her mom noticed that she was turning the can over and looking at it with a rather funny look on her face. Her mom realized the problem. It didn't have a pull top—it was an old fashioned can of soup that required a can opener. Having grown up with pull tops, her daughter didn't know how to use a can opener!

Yeah, we want Christianity to be easy—but it's not; being a true believer in Jesus is a struggle in a fallen world. Once you're baptized into God's Kingdom, and brought to faith by the Holy Spirit, you become a friend of God, but you also become an enemy to your own sinful nature, the world and the devil. That unholy triad won't make it easy for you to follow Christ

But here's the Good News: You are a Christian, aren't you?! By the grace of God, You're on your way through that narrow door as a forgiven believer in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has put you on Christ's path of righteousness that leads to eternal life!

And there's more good news. This earthly struggle is but a temporary thing—life in heaven with Jesus is a forever thing! Paul looks at the temporary struggle of the Christian life in this way: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self his being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2Cor. 4:16–18).

God strengthens your faith through the trials and tribulations of your life with Christ, and in that way He prepares you to endure in the one, true faith unto death. That may be bad news for the sinful flesh, but that's good news for the new person in Christ.

II. The Door Is Narrow and Hard to Find.

Jesus said, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." Jesus says that the door to heaven is narrow—there's only one way in, and that way in is hard to find. That sounds like more bad news,

If everyone were saved, Jesus wouldn't have had to die for sin—and the Church wouldn't need to do any evangelism. All paths would lead to God, and there would be more than one door to heaven. But that's not God's plan of salvation. God is righteous and just. Evil and evildoers must be punished. Imagine how horrible this world would be if evildoers escaped punishment. For the victims of crime, it's good news that evildoers are punished. But as sinners, we're all evildoers in God's sight, deserving of only His wrath and condemnation. If God were only just, there would be no door to heaven.

But there's good news, here, too. Not only is God just, He is gracious and merciful, too. The punishment that we deserved, Jesus took upon Himself on the cross—so that there could be a door to heaven. That may sound like bad news to the ears of many, but if there's only one way into a building, you know then that you're at the right door.

People who seek God's favor apart from Christ will find themselves at the a closed door on Judgment Day, for God's favor is found only in Jesus. Jesus alone lived the perfect life of love that God demands, and only Jesus' blood washes away the sin that divides humanity from God.

God didn't have to provide any means of salvation to sinners—that's why it's called grace. And it's good news that God located His grace in Jesus—and made that grace available to all people.

So, it may sound like bad news that you can't get into heaven by your own "seeking," apart from Christ. But the good news is that Jesus does the seeking! He came to seek and to save the lost. And He has given His Church on earth the mission to lead people from far and wide to the door that is Jesus Christ—the door that leads to life and salvation.

III. The Door to Heaven will Close.

Jesus continued His answer by saying, ²⁵"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.' ²⁶Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' ²⁸In 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."

One day, Jesus announces, the door to heaven will close. That day is Judgment Day. That day will be bad news for those who have tried to gain entrance apart from Christ. You can imagine what Jesus will say to those who claimed to follow Him, but never worshipped Him or confessed His name. To such people, Jesus will say, "I don't know you. I looked for you in church, but you were never there; I taught in your streets, but you didn't listen; I called you to repent, but you held on to your sins. Since you wouldn't confess me before men, I won't confess you before my Father in heaven."

But then Jesus said, ²⁹"And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰And behold, some are last who will be first, and

some are first who will be last.” The Good News is this: Though Jesus is the only way to heaven, the life He lived and the death He died is for all people for all time—for God so loved the world.

And so, while we pray for Christ to return, the door to heaven remains open as Christ continues to send out His Church to proclaim His Gospel to the ends of the earth, calling sinners to repent and believe in His Name. The door remains open while God patiently waits until the fullness of the Jews and Gentiles have come into His Kingdom.

And that’s Good News!

Conclusion

The world will make you feel like you are the least because you love Jesus—that’s bad news. But the good news is this: you are first in the sight of your heavenly Father. Remember the words of the apostle John: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1John 3:1–3).

This is such great encouragement in difficult times, because although suffering and sin and death are bad news, all who believe in Jesus will hear this Good News on the Last Day from the mouth of the King of kings: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34).

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.