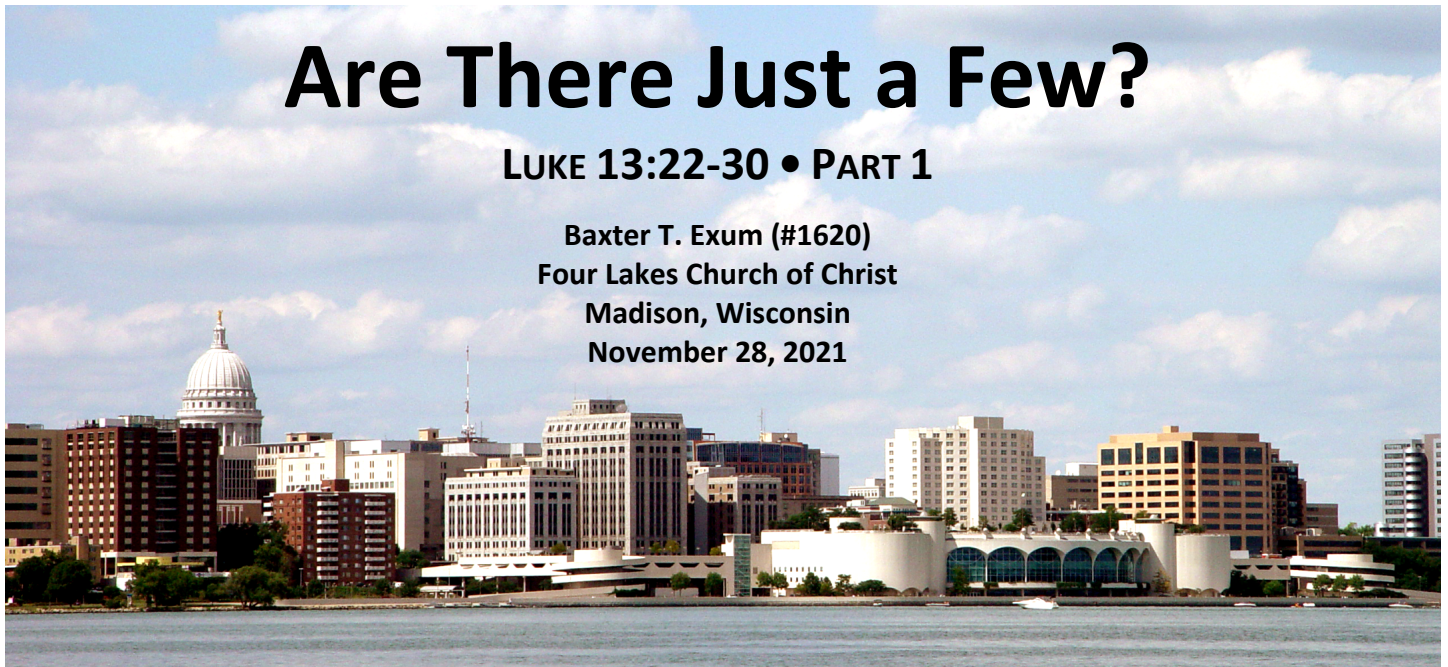


# Are There Just a Few?

**LUKE 13:22-30 • PART 1**

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Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
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It is good to be together this morning! As our custom has been, we plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after we study the word of God, so this would be a good time to get the elements for the Supper (from the table in the entryway) if you haven't done so already. Following the Lord's Supper, Clayton/Noah will be leading us in three songs before we dismiss [for class]. If you are visiting with us today, we hope you will fill out a visitor card online if you can. The QR code is on the wall up here, on the bulletin board, and also on the bulletin itself. The address is [www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor](http://www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor).

As our custom has been for many years now, we are collecting soup for Shults-Lewis Child and Family Services. The deadline is next Sunday. They hope to stop by during the week of December 5 to pick everything up. In addition to soup, we are also collecting used inkjet and printer cartridges, old cell phones, and if you would like to help with their perishables (fresh vegetables, and so on), you can get a check to me by next week, and I would be glad to pass that along.

As we get started this morning, I'm passing a recent note from our Bible Correspondence Course program. This one comes from a woman in Kingston, North Carolina, and it is addressed to the "Church of God." We are the church of God, I suppose, at least I hope we are. But this woman has apparently completed every course we have to offer. In October, we graded a total of 1136 lessons. This woman's name is Margaret, and this is what she says, "I am writing to say thank you for all the lessons that you have sent me. I have enjoyed taking these lessons and have learned some things from them and was looking forward to another lesson, but this is the final lesson. Again, I want to say thank you. I'll try and go over them from time to time." She then enclosed \$5. We do not ask for this in any way, it is our honor to cover the expenses of this program out of the weekly collection, we do have several congregations who help us with this, but I share Margaret's note by way of encouragement: What we are doing is appreciated.

Before we get to our study of God's word today, we also want to make sure we at least summarize God's plan of salvation. Our sins have separated us from God, but God has made a way for us to come back. He sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins, he died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. In response, we hear and believe the message, we turn away from sin (we repent of sin), we publicly confess our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and based on that confession we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, at which point the Christian life begins.

And we do have two examples to share this morning. The first comes to us from Matt Wallin, who works with the publication *House to House, Heart to Heart*. A few days ago, Matt shared a message from Dave Dominique, from the Lord's church in Warner Robins, Georgia. Dave says, "This is Ruth E. Ruth responded to our House-to-House door-knocking campaign and after a Back to the Bible study with a few of our ladies, she decided to put on Christ today. Thought you'd like to know." We praise God for Ruth's decision to obey the gospel this week.

And then we also have a message from Kathy Pollard, whose husband Neal preaches for the Lehman Avenue congregation in Bowling Green, Kentucky. I believe this might be where Shelby attended when she was going to college in Bowling Green. Several days ago, Kathy posted these two pictures, and she says, "Happy news! We have a new brother in Christ! Hiram Kemp studied with and baptized Antwone Jackson!" We are certainly thankful for Antwone's decision this week, and we share all of this by way of encouragement: What Antwone and Ruth have done, you can do today. Pull me aside after worship, or get in touch with one of the other elders (our contact information is on the front of the bulletin each week), and we would love to study with you.

This morning (and next week), I would like for us to study an interesting request that came from one of our members. Several weeks ago, one of our Christian brothers was asking about the meaning of the passage where Jesus describes ***"reclining at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."*** As far as I can tell, the concept is found twice in the gospel accounts, with the first reference in Matthew 8, and it's tied to the account of Jesus healing the centurion's servant. The centurion wants Jesus to heal his servant, but he doesn't feel worthy for Jesus to come under his roof, so he wants Jesus to just say the word and to heal the young man from a distance – perhaps the first example of a virtual doctor's appointment. Well, Jesus does this, and then he is amazed and says (in Matthew 8:10-12), ***"Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*** So, there is a contrast between the faith of this Gentile centurion and the faith of those in Israel. So, this is the first reference to reclining at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Today, though, I'd like for us to look at the second reference, and this one is found in response to a question in Luke 13. So, I would invite you to turn with me to Luke 13, and in Luke 13, Jesus is answering a question. We will get to the text in just a moment, but before we get there, I'd like to point out that as Jesus is teaching, somebody wants to know, ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** As to motivation, as to the context, this is pretty much all we have. We don't know WHY he is asking this question, we don't even know WHO is asking the question (whether it's a trick question from a scribe or a Pharisee, or whether this is an honest question from a disciple), but the man wants to know, ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** To me, it seems like a pretty honest question, and I say this, because the Lord doesn't condemn the man for asking it. Jesus doesn't say, ***"Oh, you of little faith,"*** or, ***"Have you not read?"*** or anything like that (as he sometimes does). But instead, the Lord gives a calm and rational answer without insulting the man. In my opinion, then, the man who is asking the question is not asking to challenge the Lord or to trick the Lord into saying something unpopular, but he's been listening to the Lord, and he can see where this is going: If what Jesus is saying is true, if I have heard the Lord correctly here, it certainly seems as if very few will be saved. If what Jesus says is true, salvation may not be quite as automatic as we have assumed it to be in the past – we aren't just born into the kingdom as a result of our genetics. And so, he wants some clarification: Have I understood you correctly?

With this as background, let's look together at Luke 13:22-30

***22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" 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. 25 Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 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 yourselves being thrown out. 29 And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."***

As we look at this paragraph, as we study this request from one of our members, I'd like arrange our thoughts on this passage around one big idea, and it comes in the reminder from Jesus that we are to ***"STRIVE,"*** or, as some translations put it, we are to ***"make every effort."*** And this is in response to the question, ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** What I find amazing is that the Lord does not answer with a "Yes," or with a "No," or with a number, but the Lord basically says: You are asking the wrong question! The man was looking for a number. The man was looking for a percentage. The man was perhaps thinking in terms of all of humanity. Jesus, though, redirects and focuses this entire discussion on the man himself, on the man personally. So, the man wants to know, ***"Lord, are there just a few?"*** And Jesus answers, ***"[YOU] strive to enter through the narrow door."*** And this reminds us that when our friends and loved ones start hearing something of what we believe, the light bulb comes on, and they may start asking, "So, you guys think you're the only ones going to heaven?" Have we ever heard that question? I have, and I'm guessing you have as well. And yet, that is the wrong question! The right question is: What must I do to be saved? And so, instead of being worried about numbers, instead of being concerned about percentages or ratios, the Lord turns to us personally and tells us to ***"strive to enter through the narrow door."*** Don't be worried about what others, don't be worried about the guy over there, but be concerned with what you are doing! Each of us individually must ***"strive to enter through the narrow door."***

Before we get to the ***"narrow door"*** part, let's notice again here at the beginning that the word ***"strive"*** is telling us to ***"make every effort."*** To ***"strive"*** is to ***"struggle."*** I don't know about you, but I don't think I've used the word ***"strive"*** in a normal conversation for a long time, if ever. I don't hang out with people who use the word ***"strive."*** I've never asked anyone whether they are ***"striving"*** today. We don't talk like that these days. But we do know the concept. The word Jesus uses here is a word that was used to describe an athlete who was straining to reach the finish line. The word Jesus uses here is the root of our English word ***"agonize."*** We must ***"agonize,"*** we must ***"struggle,"*** we must ***"make every effort"*** to enter through the narrow door. Salvation doesn't just happen to us, but there is some effort involved, and everything that comes later in this paragraph is in some way tied to this command, to this answer to the question here at the beginning. Instead of being concerned with numbers or percentages, we need to be focused personally on ***"striving."***

I. **This leads us to the Lord's first application as the man is told to STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR.**

And this is where we learn that the door is somewhat restrictive, isn't it? The door to salvation isn't wide, the path is not like the beltline, but the way to salvation is somewhat difficult, the door is narrow. This isn't a door we find by accident, but this narrow door takes some effort on our part. The word Jesus uses here is now the basis of a medical term we might be familiar with: stenosis. It refers to a narrow, restrictive opening. We might have stenosis in an artery or in the spinal column, an abnormally narrow restriction. This is the word Jesus uses here. We must make every effort, because the door to salvation is **"narrow."** It is restrictive.

I think of hiking with my sister back in September. Within the last few hundred yards of the summit of Mount Storm King, the official trail ended, and we were on our own, depending on a series of ropes that had been left by previous climbers. I'm the tiny dot in the pic on the left, and my sister is in the pic in the middle. You can see Lake Crescent behind us and roughly 4000 feet below us. We made sure not to tell my mom about the condition of the ropes until I got home (most were rather threadbare – as you can see in that picture on the right), but as we climbed and as we trusted our lives to those ropes, there were a number of places that were truly **"narrow,"** only allowing one person at a time – a rock face going straight up on one side, a cliff dropping straight down hundreds of feet on the other side, and a steep and narrow ledge ahead of us – there would be no passing, so we had to go in stages. That trail was restrictive and narrow.

Or, we might picture a basketball hoop as being restrictive. It's not impossible to get it in, but it takes some effort, doesn't it, because the hoop is restrictive. And so, if we are watching a game, and the ball goes around and around and then falls out instead of in, we don't say, "Oh, come on, give it to him!" We don't get upset at the officials for not counting that, because we understand that that's part of it. The hoop is restrictive, the hoop is **"narrow."** In the same way, in answering the question concerning whether only a few will be saved, Jesus turns to the man and tells him to **"strive,"** because the door is **"narrow."** It's not impossible, but it takes an effort. We might be tempted to argue with this, but we need to realize that God is not some hate-filled deity for making it narrow, but he's loving and tolerant for even making the door available at all! So, instead of getting all concerned about only a few being saved, the Lord's encouragement here is to take this as encouragement: Make every effort to enter through the narrow door. We must strive for it. As God said in Jeremiah 29:13, **"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."** We must strive to enter through the narrow door. Even if we think we are already in, and especially if we think we are already okay with God, we must continually strive to enter.

Before we move on from this first part, there's something else that's especially terrifying here, and that is: Even with this striving, notice (at the end of verse 24), how Jesus says, **"...for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."** So, even "seeking" is not always enough. There are **"many"** who seek who are unable to enter. It seems, then, the Lord is emphasizing that a serious struggle is required. It is impossible to coast or to drift through the door. And this absolutely agrees with what Jesus said earlier in Matthew 7:13-14, when he said, **"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."** Many in the religious world try to tell us that most people will make it; as long as you are basically a good person with a sincere and honest heart, you are good to go. Those who say this are wrong. Jesus says that **"many...will seek to enter and will not be able."**

**II. And this leads us to the second application of the big idea (in verses 25-27): There is a time coming when even the NARROW DOOR WILL BE CLOSED.**

So, it's already difficult, but once that door closes, it will truly be impossible. And so, we have the idea of a time limit. The door of salvation represents a limited time offer. And once that door is shut, it will never be reopened. We understand the idea of a opportunity that is only available for a short time, don't we? Black Friday. Cyber Monday. Our inboxes are overflowing with offers that are only good today or tomorrow or for a few hours. Most of us have probably missed a sale. Most of us have missed a deadline. Several months ago, I started looking into taking a class at the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies, where Denesha's brother-in-law serves as the director. Mark Teske spoke here in Madison a few years ago, and he was teaching a class for elders. I asked some questions, got those questions answered, but then I saw the proverbial squirrel. I got distracted, and when I went to sign up two or three weeks later, I realized that I had missed the deadline. I thought I had more time, but I didn't. Most of us know what it means to be too late.

And the picture in these verses is the picture of the head of the house locking the door at night. Here in Madison, our police department and neighborhood associations have been emphasizing the "9 o'clock routine." It's on memes and yard signs, and reminders go out every day – at 9 o'clock every night, it's time to make sure everything is locked up. Most of us have been doing this for years. We have two locks on our doors: a deadbolt and then the latch on a hinge, like a chain, but solid, similar to what we might find at a hotel. The deadbolt can be opened with a key. We keep those locked almost all the time. But the other latch on top can only be opened from the inside. We have a tradition in our family: If one of us is still out, we only do the deadbolt, but as soon as we know everybody is home for the night, we do those top locks. A few times, I've come home late at night, and I've had to wake somebody up to let me in. But now, we only do that top lock once we're all in. Do we see the picture Jesus is painting for us? If somebody comes to my door late at night after those top locks are done, I'd better know that person, or they'd better have a badge. But if I don't recognize the person on the other side, I don't plan on letting them in. They might say they know me, but if I don't know them, they are not getting in.

Several times, I've mentioned meeting some of our local politicians – Tom Barrett, and Scott Walker, and Mayor Soglin – generally, I try to thank them for their service, tell them they are in our prayers, invite them to worship with us, and give them a card from the church here. Years ago, I met Governor Walker when he was at a ribbon cutting for the new Hy-Vee down near our house. We talked for a grand total of around 30 seconds. What if I were to show up at his house in Wauwatosa at midnight tonight, pounding on his door, demanding to be let in? I could say, "Hey, Governor Walker, it's me, Baxter! We met at Hy-Vee ten years ago! Let me in! I need to talk to you tonight!" Do you think he would let me in? I don't think so.

In a slightly similar way, there is a time when the door for a relationship with the Lord is open, but once that door is closed, it is closed. We may claim to know the Lord, but if he does not know us, it is too late, and we are not getting in. We might think back to the days of Noah. Noah had 120 years to build an ark, he had 120 years to convince the world to get on the ark, but once the time was up, God shut the door. Do we remember that? Noah didn't have the burden of shutting that door. That was up to God. And once the door was shut, the rain started, and that was it. That seems to be the picture Jesus is painting for us here. Or, we might think of taking a test in school. When the time is up, the time is up. When the professor says, "Put your pencils down," that's it. We have a limited amount of time to get things done, and when time runs out, the door has been shut, never to be reopened.

Spiritually speaking, this door of opportunity shuts either at our own death or at the Lord's return, whichever comes first. And no amount of begging or explaining can change this. In verse 25, they say, **"Lord, open up to us!"** But the Lord replies, **"I do not know where you are from."** And remember: Jesus is talking to Jews here. They are obviously from Israel, but the Lord doesn't recognize this. Where they are from is not important at this point. I think of our elections here in Wisconsin, we need to prove two things: Who you are and where you live. A current and valid Wisconsin driver's license is the gold standard and proves both. But in the absence of a license, we have literally hundreds of other possible combinations to prove who you are and where you live. But in this picture, Jesus explains that where they are from doesn't matter. In the same way, if you show up to vote at 8:01 p.m. here in Wisconsin, it doesn't really matter where you live, it doesn't matter what documents you might have, because it's too late. That's what the Lord is saying here.

Then, in verse 26, these people remind Jesus, **"We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets."** These people had seen the Lord. They had eaten together. They had heard him teach. But there was a time coming when it would be too late. And once the door closes, the Lord says that he will refer to them as **"evildoers."** Isn't that terrifying? We can pray at every meal, we can worship every Lord's Day, we can live an upright and moral life, but if the Lord doesn't recognize us at the door on the last day, it is too late. As I was preparing for today's lesson, I found someone describe hell as "nothing but truth known too late." What a sad statement. Thankfully, though, for us right now, the door is still open. It is narrow, but open, and so the encouragement here is to step through it before it is too late.

### Conclusion:

This brings us to a good place to pause for a bit, and hopefully we can come back together next week to look at the rest of this passage. Today, though, we've seen someone ask the Lord whether just a few will be saved. His answer is, **"Strive! Make every effort!"** His answer is: Wrong question! We cannot get distracted by numbers and percentages, but the Lord tells us to re-focus on what we need to be doing: 1.) We must strive to enter through the narrow door, and 2.) We must strive with a sense of urgency, because there is a time coming when even the narrow door will close. The door is narrow, but thankfully, at least for now, the door is still open. Next week, we will continue by noticing that there are some eternal consequences to how we handle this question.

As we close our thoughts on this passage (and before we partake of the Lord's Supper), let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We come to you in prayer this morning, praising you as our loving and all-powerful Father. You know our struggles. You know that we often try but fail, to live up to the perfect example set by your Son. We ask that you forgive us of our sins as we fall short. We pray that with your help we might be able to live each day so that we can look back without regret. We ask for the courage and wisdom to look for, and to find, and to take the way of escape, whenever we are faced with temptation.

We pray that you would bless those who are struggling with the weight of this life – anxiety, depression, the weight of caring for a loved one; bless John as he faces surgery this week, and bless Denise as well. We pray for everyone involved in that process, we are thankful for their knowledge and skill, and we pray for a successful surgery and quick recovery.

We are thankful for those who are visiting with us today, and we ask for safe travels as they return home.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. We come to you in the name of your Son Jesus.

Lord, come quickly, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)