

Message Summary

The Christian life is a journey of following Christ. It is not a point, but a process. It is a narrow way that evidences how much we want God. Success in all life endeavors comes through hard work. Jesus describes discipleship in just such terms: a process of intently agonizing and striving to enter a narrow way (Lk. 13:22-30). A love for people and desire for everyone to go to heaven often compels our culture to see narrowness as a vice, to be replaced by a wide, broad way everyone can enjoy. But this perspective loves and elevates people in a way that replaces God, which is idolatry (cf. Jn. 12:41-43; Col. 3:5). Jesus teaches that the narrow way, though hard and less traveled, is the only way that leads to life (cf. Mt. 7:13-14).

Jesus Himself is on a journey towards Jerusalem, where He would be crucified on behalf of our sin and raised for our justification (Lk. 9:51; cf. Rm. 4:23-25). The crowds following him had apparently grown smaller and smaller (cf. Lk. 4:28-30; Jn. 6:66-71), which prompted someone in the crowd asked Jesus about the diminishing crowds. Jesus' answer was to not speculate about numbers, but strive to enter the narrow door. The narrow door forces each of us to answer the question, "How bad do you want God?" If we truly want God more than anything, we will strive, agonize, work, labor, and fight to enter that narrow door, which Jesus regards as true discipleship.

At first this sounds contradictory to many more often-quoted passages of the Bible, but in fact Jesus' assertion is well attested. Salvation indeed comes by grace through faith, which leads to good works for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10). Non-active faith is dead faith. Real faith is vibrant and active (Jm. 2:17). Faith is worked out over time, evidence that God is working in us (Phil. 2:12-13). Tough physical workouts are of some benefit, but not nearly as much as strenuous training in godliness (1 Tm. 4:8-10). Resistance to sin is an active struggle (Hb. 12:3-4). The narrow door reminds us that nothing – even eating and drinking with Jesus and listening to his teaching – can replace the agony of discipleship. We must want God more than degrees, paychecks, marriage, children, health, and food. But the narrow door also reminds us of what is on the other side – a banquet with Jesus himself (v. 29). Soon there will come a time when it is too late to enter, with endless weeping and gnashing of teeth. This leaves us with the urgency to ensure we are striving to enter, and compelling others to come with us (cf. Lk. 14:15-24).

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Christianity is often viewed as one-time decisionism rather than lifetime discipleship. What is wrong with decisionism? How does this passage refute it?

How does the gospel teach both free salvation by grace through faith (cf. Jn. 3:16-18; Rm. 3:21-31; Eph. 2:8-9) and an agonizing discipleship that will cost us everything (cf. Lk. 13:22-30; Eph. 2:10; Jm. 2:17; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Tm. 4:8-10)? Is it a temptation for you to emphasize one over the other?

"The Bible constantly lowers our expectations for this life, and relentlessly raises our hopes for the next one" (John Piper). How does the truth of a banquet (v. 29) offer hope to those on the hard and narrow way leading to life? What is the best part of this banquet?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Are you truly on the journey of following Jesus, or are you among those who turn away when Jesus' teaching becomes difficult (cf. Jn. 6:66-70)?
2. Are you loving or desiring the approval of people in a way that replaces God? How can you grow this week in the fear of God rather than the fear of man? (Cf. Prov. 29:25; Gal. 1:10: "If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.")
3. Are there any ways in which you are expecting God to come and fulfill your own dreams? What dreams can you start redirecting towards kingdom ends this week? Are there any dreams you need to let die completely?
4. Do you want God more than anything? What things (even good things!) this week may be a temptation towards idolatry (such as education, paychecks, marriage, children, health, food, or jobs)? What is a kingdom perspective of these things you can develop now to keep from idolizing them?
5. This week, how can you lower your hopes and expectations for this life and raise your hopes for the coming, heavenly banquet with Christ (v. 29)?
6. Who this week do you need to urgently tell of the narrow way before it is too late (vv. 26-28)? How does the message of a narrow way impact the way you present the gospel to them?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for Christ's faithfulness to follow his journey to Jerusalem to bear his cross and die for our sin (Lk. 9:51)
 - Pray that the Lord would give our church the hard work and training in godliness the gospel requires for true Christians, and that we would walk faithfully in the good works which He prepared beforehand.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that people in the Gadsden area would not confuse eating, drinking, and listening in church activities with the real, costly discipleship to which Jesus calls us.
 - Pray that the Lord would remove the fear of man and give us boldness to proclaim the gospel, even when it is hard to speak and receive.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray that God would fulfill his promise that "people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God" (v. 29), and allow our church to be part of it through prayer and proclamation.
 - Pray for Greg Johnson and his family in the Central Asia Project. Pray specifically that the Lord would, by 2025, establish a church in every town in Kyrgyzstan of more than 10,000 people, and from these plant churches in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Pray also that the Lord would open doors to push south towards Iran and Afghanistan, "where Christ has not been named" (Rm. 15:20).