

August 21, 2022

Luke 13:22-30:

**“Strive...”**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

In the popular movie adaptations of the book “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” written in 1964 by British author Roald Dahl, the fictional story is told of a young boy named Charlie Bucket inside the chocolate factory of eccentric chocolatier Willy Wonka. Wonka held a contest that included the distribution of five hidden golden tickets for lucky winners to receive a tour of the chocolate factory. The famous chocolate room of the movies and books has been in children’s dreams since the 60s. Everything in this room is made of candy, chocolate, and sweets galore; you can even eat the grass and taste the wallpaper. Before the lucky prize winners enter this room, they are met with a hallway growing narrower as they reach the door of this off-the-wall factory. This door turns out to be miniature as if no one can enter. Finally, Willy Wonka opens it revealing the beauty of the lollipop trees and chocolate river.

Like the five lucky children, we too are faced with a narrow door where there is a reward for us in the Kingdom of Heaven. But this door is not comparable to the door that Willy Wonka opens. This is not only because Wonka’s is a fictional door but also because the door which Jesus opens does not have all of our sinful wants and desires. Behind His door is eternal life; all we need and should want is found in Him.

In the most recent adaptation of the film, as Wonka is about to open the door to the chocolate room, one of the children asks him, “Why is the door so small?” Wonka answers, “It’s to keep all the great big chocolatey flavor inside.” In our text for today, Jesus is confronted by someone on His journey to Jerusalem. He is asked, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” Jesus’ answer is not a sarcastic response as Wonka’s is. Instead, Jesus, the nonfictional God-man, will not allow men to ask theoretical questions like these. The theoretical is dangerous in that it can hinder salvation and harm faith. So, Jesus says to them, “Strive.”

### **Jesus Gives A Command**

and this command is of the utmost importance. As put by the Concordia Self-Study Commentary, “Jesus’ answer is therefore not a statement but a command: *Strive*. Strive to take up God’s call into your heart and will, though it be against the grain and in the face of the majority.” Christ wants us to concern ourselves with our own salvation before we can worry about the salvation of others. In the end, all of us will be judged. This judgment will be swift and perfect. The Christian life is not one of ease or one of great prosperity. It is a constant battle to strive for God’s call by the work of the Holy Spirit. This call is to follow Christ and this should be our primary focus as Christians. As stated in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The Concordia Self-Study Commentary is correct that the majority do not have their focus on the Kingdom of Heaven. Their focus is on the sinful and damning deeds of the world. This makes it even harder for us to stay focused and strive for what’s right. It can make it seemingly impossible at times.

As I’m sure all of our parents or guardians have said before, “If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you?” All sorts of people jump off the metaphorical bridge when it comes to matters of the faith. Brothers and Sisters, do not jump off the bridge with them. A life of sin and rejection of God may seem appealing to the sinful flesh. But the bridge does not have water at the bottom that may save you. It has a lake of fire and eternal damnation. The commentary goes on to say, “Strive now before it’s too late before the door is shut forever on men who can claim historical knowledge of Jesus but have not been moved to repentance and faith by Him and cannot be acknowledged by him.” Well, what has the historical knowledge of Jesus produced? Historical skepticism says that Jesus is just

who people made him out to be, thereby turning him into someone who is not the savior. Many claim that Jesus never made a messianic claim, never instituted sacraments, never predicted his death or rose from the dead, and that the disciples made it all up and invented Jesus' history.

We know the truth. All of Scripture is breathed out by God. Jesus is real God and real man. He came into the flesh to die on the cross so that by faith in Him, we will live. If we see contradictions, that is not God's fault. It is ours. And if we follow the historical critics, if we give in to a reliance on human logic and understanding, then...

### **Jesus' Door Will Shut Forever**

...on us. The command given by Jesus is tacked on with a warning. From our text, He states, "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.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' 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."

Hell is not easy to consider due to its severity. This society's ideas often make it seem like hell is too severe for the nonbeliever. Do not be mistaken. Descriptions like weeping, gnashing of teeth, darkness, everlasting punishment, lakes of fire, and the others are not just exaggerations. Striving to be devoid of anything related to God has consequences beyond our imagination. This is where doors without Jesus lead us. The doors of sinful pleasure, wants, and desires are not life-giving. They are doors that eventually become fiery furnaces that engulf even the strongest of man's will. Worst of all, despite his previous rejection of God, the one who is damned knows the Lord now. He knows what he rejected and what could have been. That is why he will say to Jesus, "We ate and drank in your presence..." because the man in his suffering will say anything to have what could have been. He will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets looking down from Heaven. He will do anything to go back from this damnation to strive for the will of God. And God will say to the one who chose the sin over He who gave Himself for us, "I do not know where you come from."

At this point, you may be asking yourself the question...

### **Am I in God's Kingdom?**

Or maybe you're asking, what does it mean to strive? From the very beginning of His preaching, Jesus has already given us the answer in Matthew 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." How does one the size of a human enter through the narrow door? How does a camel go through the eye of the needle, as stated in Matthew 19? In his commentary on Luke, Arthur A. Just Jr. answers these questions for us saying, "The struggle (or striving) is produced when the Word of God-such as the teaching of Jesus here-calls one to repent and trust in Christ, but sinful human nature wars against God's Word. The struggle is resolved as the Old Adam is put to death by the Law and the person of faith is raised to new life with Christ by the power of the Gospel."

The prize winners of Wonka's game walked down the hallway while it shrunk and they stayed the same size. But for Jesus' door, we must shrink by the grace of God. The weight of sin and the Law must have its impact on us and the Gospel of Jesus will bring us through. Do not think yourself perfect because of your church attendance or how you present yourselves. Do not begin to feel so secure that you lose your faith altogether. And when you have shrunken, because the Law of God

has taken its full effect, repent and believe in your salvation through Jesus. Stay steadfast in repentance and do not ignore death as the consequence of our sin.

The words of Paul cover this in Colossians 1:21-23: "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard ..." Let's look at that last part again, "if indeed you continue in faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard..." None of us, not a single one, is worthy of the salvation granted through Jesus Christ. We deserve to be left to ourselves and left with no hope for eternal salvation. Praise be to God that we are saved from such a fate. The Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts and has brought us to repent that we might strive for the sake of God's will.

Recall the days of Noah. The people were being warned of the coming flood one hundred and twenty years in advance. Everything Noah said went in one ear and out the other because the men, women, and children were engulfed in their sin. Their only concern was to do precisely what they weren't supposed to do and in excess. They sat around all day, ignoring and not striving to follow the commands of God. We are now living in the post-flood version of the day of Noah. The signs of Revelation have already been fulfilled. The question is, how long will God tolerate man's sins before His wrath and doom descend upon the world? This time, it will not be a flood but a final judgment. Rather than wondering what day it will be or concerning ourselves with the number of people who will be in heaven, concern yourselves simply with your salvation. As stated in Hebrews 4:9-11, "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us, therefore, strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." We enter that rest for which we strive through the door of Christ. God has taken care of what needs to be done to save us from our wretchedness. God has taken care of our needs for the sake of His Son Jesus, who is our mediator and our savior.

The most recent "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" film ends with Charlie Bucket winning the entirety of the chocolate factory. Wonka makes it clear that this requires him to leave his family behind. Wonka explains, "A chocolatier has to run free and solo. He has to follow his dreams...darn the consequences. Look at me - I had no family, and I'm a giant success." Charlie responds, "So if I go with you to the factory, I won't ever see my family again?" Wonka naively says, "Yeah! Consider that a bonus!" Charlie then shuts him down, saying, "Then I'm not going. I wouldn't give up my family for anything- not for all the chocolate in the world." The world's logic has always been right in line with Willy Wonka. "A person must run free and solo! Our dreams and prerogatives are more important than what Jesus says! Look at me - I don't believe in Jesus, and I'm a giant success!" But the Christian is like Charlie. He is poor, his family struggles, and his life is not easy. But in the face of all temptation, in the face of everything he always wanted and all the riches that come with it now, he chooses what is right. Let us strive to say to the Willy Wonka's of the world, "I wouldn't give up my faith in Jesus for anything- not for all the chocolate in the world."

Amen.

Seminarian Lucas Abbott