

INTRODUCTION

Since I first learned about heaven as a child, I've been fascinated with the thought of living with Jesus forever. When I was a senior in college I was the Youth Minister at First Baptist Church in Prattville, Alabama. On weekends Cindy and I stayed in a mobile home out on the farm where one of the church members, Horace Cook, kept horses and cattle. Although I was the Youth Minister I also led the Children's Church service, so I got to know and love all the children as well. The Cooks had a five-year-old son, Richard, and we became good buddies. One pretty Saturday afternoon, Richard and I were walking around the farm, exploring the pastures, talking and hanging out. We topped a little hill and on the other side, we found a dead horse. Apparently it had been dead for several days because there were flies everywhere. Richard was fascinated and his eyes got as big as baseballs and he asked, "What happened to this horse?" I suspected that it was his first encounter with death, so I wanted to say something profound to help him gently deal with the death. Drawing upon my extensive education and experience, I knelt down, and in my most pastoral voice, said, "Richard, this horse has died, and now he's in heaven with Jesus." Richard looked at that dead horse and then looked at me with a funny expression that I'll never forget. He said, "Yuck! What's Jesus gonna' do with a dead horse?" So much for teaching him about heaven! I couldn't really answer his question, so I just stood and said, "Never mind, let's just go tell your dad."

I hope I have better success in explaining heaven to you than I had with little Richard! This is a message that will tell you how you can go to heaven when you die. Many of you are already Believers and know you are going to heaven, so you may wonder why I'm speaking on this topic. I teach through the Bible one verse at a time, and this passage is next in our study. In God's perfect timing, I believe there is someone here today, or watching on television who needs to hear this simple salvation message. Also, the Bible makes it clear many people *think* they are going to heaven, and they are mistaken. So it's good to occasionally clear our minds of all of our preconceived notions and consider *how* a person can go to heaven. Heaven can only be entered through a narrow door—have you found Heaven's narrow door? Let's read about it beginning in Luke 13:22:

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'" There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

If you want to enter heaven, there are four important truths you need to understand:

1. THERE IS ONLY ONE DOOR TO HEAVEN...AND IT IS NARROW

These words of Jesus are not politically correct in our age of religious pluralism. If Jesus came to America preaching this message today, He would be labeled a radical and would probably be arrested. In fact, that's exactly why the Jews arrested Him and executed Him 2,000 years ago. To say there is only one way to heaven is an unpopular stance today. Most people think there are many ways to get to heaven. Once a man told me getting to heaven was like flying from DFW to LAX. I could fly American Airlines, and he could fly Delta, and somebody else could fly Northwest or Southwest airlines, but we'd all get to the same destination. Doesn't that sound logical? I told him that sounded logical, but when you get on an airliner, you could never be 100% certain it would arrive at the intended destination; it could be diverted by weather, hijacked, have mechanical problems, or even crash. I told him I am booked to fly on Jesus Airlines and it's the only one in the universe with a 100% on time arrival record!

Or you can visit the Bahai Temple near Chicago. It's a beautiful building with nine doors, each representing the major belief systems of the world. The idea is that you can still approach God, it doesn't matter which door you enter. Most Americans believe it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are "sincere." Well, those Palestinian suicide bombers are sincere in their beliefs, and they are wrong. You can be sincere—and be sincerely wrong.

For Jesus (or any of us) to insist there is just one way to heaven seems too narrow-minded in this age of enlightenment. But look at His words again in verse 24. He didn't speak of different doors, or different airliners. He didn't say "enter through *one* of the narrow doors." He spoke of THE narrow door. Other scriptures confirm there is *only* one way to heaven.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) "For salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Now, let me misquote this verse the way most folks believe. Jesus said, "I am one of the ways, part of the truth, and one kind of life. No one comes to the Father unless they are religious and good and kind and sincere in whatever it is they believe." Jesus didn't say He was ONE of the ways or even the BEST way; He said He was the ONLY way.

For five decades, Billy Graham has been filling stadiums around the world preaching Jesus is the only way to heaven. He always has a banner with John 14:6 placed in a prominent place. As you can imagine, many people think his position is too narrow-minded. Several years ago, after he conducted a crusade in Melbourne, Australia, a woman wrote a letter of complaint to the newspaper. Her words are typical of many who do not appreciate our insistence that Jesus is the only way to heaven. She wrote:

"After hearing Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television...I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul (and everyone else's) needs saving—whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost. Nor do I feel that I wallow in the mire of sin, although his preaching insists that I do. Give me practical religion that teaches gentleness and kindness and acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged

and teaches children about goodness and not about sin. If, in order to save my soul, I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned."

Sadly, Jesus confirmed that millions of people share her attitude. He pointed out that only a relatively few people are going to be saved. Now I don't want to be dogmatic about it, I want to be BULLDOGMATIC about it! What's wrong with being dogmatic about some things? If you go in for surgery, you wouldn't want your surgeon to say to you the night before the surgery: "I don't want to be dogmatic about the way to do this surgery, I think I'll try a different approach this time...I may try going in from the other side for a change. After all, there's more than one way to skin a cat." You'd say, "but I'm not a cat, and I don't want to be skinned! Do the surgery the way you were taught to do it!"

Or what about the rules to sports? They are pretty dogmatic. Imagine the Dallas Mavericks end up playing the Lakers in the NBA finals and it's the last game. The score is tied with no time on the clock. Steve Nash has a free throw to win the game and win the NBA championship. He shoots and the ball hits the rim and bounces up and hits the rim again, it rattles around the rim and almost goes in, but then the ball falls outside the hoop. He missed. But wait a minute, Don Nelson is lodging a protest: the ball *almost* went in, it hit the rim four times—go ahead and give him the bucket! How far do you think he would get with that protest? You can't bend God's rules either. The people in this passage were *at* the door, they were even knocking on the door. Almost getting into the door won't get you into heaven. When it comes to your eternal salvation there is only one door. What is it?

2. HEAVEN'S DOOR IS KNOWING GOD...BY KNOWING JESUS

This past Monday night, our FAITH evangelism teams went out and conducted a religious poll. One of the questions on the poll was: In your personal opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven? As you can imagine, our folks got a variety of interesting answers. Everybody has an opinion. We even tell jokes about getting into heaven. A certain lady died and stood at the gates of heaven. She could look in and see a beautiful banquet table set, with all of her family members who had died before sitting and enjoying the feast. They all saw her and started waving and motioning her to come in. A saint appeared and said, "Hello. We've been waiting for you."

She said, "This is such a wonderful place, how do I get in?"

The gatekeeper smiled and said, "All you have to do is correctly spell one word."

"What is it?" she anxiously asked.

"Spell 'love'" he said. The woman smiled and spelled "L.O.V.E.," and she was welcomed into heaven.

About a year later, this same woman was on gate duty when her husband arrived unexpectedly. She said, "Oh, I'm surprised to see you! How have you been doing?" He said, "Actually, I've been doing really well since you died. Do you remember that pretty nurse that took care of you? We fell in love and married a few months after you died. Then I won the lottery and we sold our little home and moved into a huge mansion. My new wife and I have been traveling all over the world. In fact we were just on a skiing trip to the Swiss Alps when I was caught in an avalanche, that's why I'm here. By the way, how do I get in? His ex-wife said, "All you have to do is spell

one word correctly and you can enter heaven." He said, "Okay, what's the word?" She smiled and said, "Czechoslovakia."

You can't get into heaven by spelling or *doing* anything. The most common incorrect answer given to answer the question of how to get into heaven is: Do good or be good. Wrong. Access into eternal life and heaven can only be gained when you have a personal relationship with God.

In verse 25 Jesus describes people who will be pounding on heaven's door after it is shut. They will be hollering, "Let me in! Open the door! I went to church; I even went to Sunday School! I gave my money to the church. I even worked for you! Hey, let me in!" Notice the reply of the Master of the house as He says, "I don't KNOW you." It's all about knowing God. Do you know Jesus Christ? Does He know you? He said in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them." Do you recognize God's voice when you hear it? Does Jesus *know* you?

All of us in this room know about President Bush, but only a few people here actually claim to know him. I've met him and shaken his hand, but I don't really know him. Maybe you've met him or shaken his hand. But only a very few, people here are known by him. If President Bush walked into this room, he wouldn't say, "Hey, David, how're you doing?" But there a very few folks in this church and a few more in this city who have visited with him enough that you are known by him. The same can be said about Jesus. Everyone here knows *about* Jesus, but some of you might have had casual contact with Him, but others of us have met Him and we know Him intimately because we talk with him regularly. By the way, it's easier to gain access to Jesus than it is to President Bush, so feel free to get to know Him. Eternal life is knowing Jesus.

Once again, for about the hundredth time, let me call your attention to the verse that best defines what eternal life is. Jesus prayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they may *know you*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3) Eternal life is not existing forever. It is KNOWING God. That's the door to heaven. And it is the *only* way to get into heaven.

I love to read fables because they are like the parables of Jesus. Many of them teach practical lessons that can be applied to spiritual truth. There's an old Russian fable about a cat and a fox. The fox bragged to the cat about how clever he was. He claimed he had hundreds of ways of escaping from the hunters who chased him. He could hide in a hole, or backtrack in a creek, or lie flat in the tall grass. He was proud of his bag of tricks. The cat replied she only had one way of escape—but that seemed to work. At that moment they heard the sounds of the hounds coming toward them. The cat scampered up the tree and hid herself among the leaves. She said to the fox, "This is my plan. What are you going to do?" The fox first thought of one plan, then of another. While he was debating the best plan, the hounds came closer. At last, in his confusion, the fox was caught by hounds and soon killed by the hunters. The cat witnessed the whole scene and provides the moral of the story: "Better one safe way than a hundred by which you cannot be sure."

God is Spirit and no man can see Him without dying. That's why Jesus came to this planet. God took on human flesh and became one of us so that we can relate to him. In John 10:9. Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

The narrow door into heaven is Jesus Himself. There is no other way to get into heaven than by trusting in Jesus as your Lord.

Maybe you have heard of the name "Ivan the Terrible." You may be thinking, "Yeah, I kept that kid last week in the church nursery." Ivan the Terrible was crowned the first Czar of all of Russia in 1547. The term Czar means "Caesar." He was cruel and ruthless. He gouged out the eyes of the architects who built the beautiful St. Basil's Cathedral so they would never be able to build anything more beautiful. He had seven wives and abused them all. He even killed his own son in a fit of anger. There were many other reasons why later generations gave him the title "terrible." When he died in 1584, the leaders of the church followed his strange instructions. They shaved his head, and dressed him in a Monk's robe. Ivan knew he was such a wicked man that he was hoping God would mistake him for a monk and let him into heaven. I call him "Ivan the Stupid." My friend, you can't get into heaven by disguising yourself as someone and hoping God will mistake you for him or her. There is only one door and that door is Jesus.

3. DESTRUCTION OR DELIGHT ?...CHOOSE YOUR DOOR

There are only two doors leading to eternity. One is the door of delight and the other is the door to destruction. You may be familiar with the story by Frank Stockton called "The Lady and the Tiger." It's a love story about a common gardener who fell in love with a princess. Her father, the king, discovered their love and arrested the man. On a certain day, the young gardener was to be placed in an arena facing two doors. Behind one door was a beautiful lady. If the prisoner chose that door, he would marry the beautiful lady and be exalted to prominence in the kingdom. If he chose the door with the tiger behind it, the beast would eat him. The king believed that fate would determine the guilt or innocence of the man on trial.

The princess was heartbroken. She managed to find out what was behind each door so she could give a sign to her lover. On the night before the strange trial, the princess couldn't sleep, what should she do? Could she bear to see him marry another woman? On the other hand, could she bear to see him eaten by the tiger? She was torn by indecision.

The next day, her true love stood in the packed arena. Behind one door was a beautiful lady and life. Behind the other door was a ferocious tiger and death. He glanced at the princess and she made a distinct motion with her right hand. That was his sign. Without hesitation, the young man walked to the door on the right and opened it—and that's where the story ends. The writer asks the reader to decide what the princess decided. It ends with the question: What came out—the lady or the tiger?

Each of us also faces two doors. Behind one is life eternal. Behind the other is death and destruction. However, there is no mystery involved in these doors. The doors are clearly marked and Jesus tells us what is behind each door. Beginning in verse 28 Jesus describes the fate of those who *don't* enter through the narrow door. He says there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." That means there will be hopeless sorrow and unending pain. It makes me shiver in revulsion just thinking about it. Jesus said that these people will "see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the prophets." One of the worst parts of hell is the ability to *realize* others are in heaven and

you aren't. What a terrible place hell will be. In his epic, *Inferno*, Dante described hell as having different levels and circles of torment. He created minute details you never find in scripture. But he got it right in one respect. He inscribed over the gate to hell these words: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

Then Jesus contrasts that awful scene with the delightful glories of heaven. People from all four points of the compass, from all over the planet will gather for a feast! The Kingdom of God is like a feast, not a funeral. So, how do you get to enjoy the party and miss the pain? Choose the right door. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lets us know there are actually *two* doors that lead to two totally different destinies. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)

Consider the two doors. The one leading to destruction and hell is wide and easy to find. Jesus said most of the world is on the pathway that leads to that door. But the door that leads to the delights of eternal life is a narrow door and only a few find it. God loves you so much He has made a way for you to *know* Him and to spend eternity with Him. But He also loves you so much He has honored you by giving you the capacity to choose.

4. HEAVEN'S DOOR IS OPEN NOW...SOMEDAY IT WILL BE SHUT

I can tell you that on today, April 14, 2002, God's door of grace is still wide open. But in verse 25 Jesus says one day the Master of the house will get up and close the door. The door could close for you today. You could die today, and that would close the door. Or, Jesus could return today and that would close the door of grace as well. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know things are heating up to a new level in Israel. All of that is a clear indication we are in the season of the return of Christ. So, if you haven't trusted Jesus yet, do it today. Christian, if there is someone you know and love who hasn't walked through God's narrow door yet, don't let another day pass by without lovingly urging them to trust Jesus alone for their salvation.

You can choose to enter heaven's door today. Jesus said it's a narrow door. Think about that for a minute. It's so narrow only one person can walk through it at one time. In other words, you can't walk through heaven's door holding your daddy's hand, or your mother's hand. I thank God my parents told me about Jesus, but when it came time for me to give Him my life, I walked through that door all by myself. Some of you think because your grandfather was a preacher or your mother was a godly saint that you can walk through with them—but you can't. The narrow door to heaven says, "One person at a time, please."

Do you know what else it means because it's a narrow door? It's so narrow you can't bring a bunch of excess baggage with you. In fact, you've got to unload all your "stuff" before you walk through it. I read once about a hiker who got trapped in a cave. He found a small opening to escape, but he couldn't squeeze through with his backpack. So, he removed his backpack, and then his canteen, and then his jacket before he could slip through the opening. When you walk through the door of heaven, you've got to leave your backpack of sinful habits and sinful attitudes behind; it's a narrow door. As the old songs says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, Only to your cross I cling."

CONCLUSION

Have you discovered Heaven's narrow door? Jesus is inviting you to come to Him today. Is there a need in your life? Does there seem to be an unquenchable thirst in your soul you haven't been able to satisfy by anything this world offers? On the last page of the Bible, God extends an invitation to you: The Spirit and the Bride (the Church) say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him *come*; and *whoever wishes*, let him take the free gift of the water of life! (Revelation 22:17)

The Bible speaks about another kind of door: it's the door to your heart. And the way you walk through heaven's door is by asking Jesus to come into the door of your heart. The most famous painting of the 19th Century is by English artist Holman Hunt and is called "The Light of the World." It's a dark picture because it is night, symbolizing that the night has come, and the day of salvation is almost over. Jesus is wearing a crown of thorns standing at a door with a lantern in His hand. He is knocking on the door and the message is hard to miss. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Look at me! I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you." (Revelation 3:20, *The Message*). Art critics looked at the painting and pointed out that Holman Hunt made a mistake—there was no latch on the door. His reply silenced the critics. He said the door of our heart only has a doorknob on the inside. We are the only ones who can open our hearts to Jesus.

Right now, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. He's knocking. Do you hear His voice? Will you open your heart to Him? When you do that, you have found the Heaven's narrow door.

OUTLINE

1. THERE IS ONLY ONE DOOR TO HEAVEN...AND IT IS NARROW

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." *John 14:6*

"For salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." *Acts 4:12*

2. HEAVEN'S DOOR IS KNOWING GOD...BY KNOWING JESUS

Jesus prayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they may KNOW YOU, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." *John 17:3*

Jesus said, "I AM THE DOOR. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." *John 10:9*

3. DESTRUCTION OR DELIGHT ?...CHOOSE YOUR DOOR

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to DESTRUCTION, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to LIFE, and only a few find it." *Matthew 7:13-14*

4. HEAVEN'S DOOR IS OPEN NOW...SOMEDAY IT WILL BE SHUT

The Spirit and the Bride (the Church) say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him COME; and WHOEVER WISHES, let him take the free gift of the water of life! *Revelation 22:17*

"Look at me! I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you." *Revelation 3:20, The Message*



DISCLAIMER: These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes