

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 11

August 21, 2022

Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

Will _____ go to heaven?

—Luke 13:22-30

²² He went on his way from one town and village to another, teaching, and making his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone said to him, “Lord, are only a few going to be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Strive to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ Once the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open for us!’ He will tell you in reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come 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 don’t know where you come from. Depart from me, all you evildoers.’ ²⁸ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown outside. ²⁹ People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ And note this: Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

“You see, It’s all about perspective. If two people are standing on opposite sides of a number painted on the pavement, these people may perceive that they are viewing very different things. The man on the right asserts, “This is a six. If you see anything else, you are wrong. Don’t get me started on the crazy people on the left.” The man on the left asserts, “This is a nine. If you see anything else, you are wrong. The people on the right are insane.”

It’s all about perspective. The man on the right and the man on the left believe they are looking at quite different things. The man on the right sees a six. The man on the left sees a nine. They both proclaim this loudly and clearly. Yet, the problem is that from their perspectives, they are right, and the other is wrong. What these men need to do is step back and see either one of them could be correct.

It’s all about perspective. This is what religiosity is like. People proclaim clearly what they see and what they perceive. Yet, in reality, they are all looking at the same thing. One says, “Allah.” The other says, “God.” Another says “Life-Giver, Changing Women, Slayer of Monsters, and Child of Water.”

It’s all about perspective. There is no right. There is no wrong. All perspectives look to the same thing. All paths lead in the same direction.”

Have you ever heard such a thought? Ultimately, this is a foolish argument. The number cannot be both a six and a nine. You need to go back to the person who painted the number on the pavement. Both people cannot be correct. Yet, this is the line of thinking presented by many, even some alleged Christians. Those who present this line of thought want to believe that all people will go to heaven. This is the false teaching called universalism.

This year, I am teaching a class to the 8th graders at Emmanuel on apologetics. Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. In this class, we know that our task is not to convince someone of the truth; only the Holy Spirit can do this. In this class, we wrestle with difficult questions that might come our way regarding the faith. This line of thought is one of the issues with which we are wrestling.

The problem with which we are wrestling is that of the exclusivity of Christianity. The Bible makes exclusive claims. The Bible does not say that all people will go to heaven.

It is interesting to notice the difference in the question that the man asks Jesus in this reading. While Jesus was teaching, this man did not get the perception that all would go to heaven. Instead, he asks the question if only a few will go to heaven.

This man wrestled with a question you might have thought about as well. He looked at the others and thought, ‘will these people go to heaven?’ Perhaps you have had a similar question. Perhaps you have looked at your neighbors, children, relatives, and others, asking the question, “**will _____ go to heaven?**” You can fill in the line with a person you have thought about.

If you have considered this question before, what was the spirit of the question? Did you look at your child who was baptized 25 years ago and no longer attends church? Maybe, you asked this question out of concern. Did you look at your neighbor who practices another religion but is a nice person? Maybe, you asked this question out of desperation because your neighbor is better and more devout in a religious sense than you are. Did you look at your fellow church member who

you know isn't giving as much as you... or isn't helping out as much as you... or isn't as active as you? Maybe, you asked this question out of judgment because you don't believe this individual deserves to go to heaven.

If you have considered the question, "**will _____ go to heaven?**" You can learn from Jesus' answer to this individual that you are, perhaps, asking the wrong question. If the question is out of legitimate concern for a loved one, that is not wrong. Yet, based on Jesus' answer to this individual, you can tell his question was not out of concern. When the man asked if only a few would be saved, this man asked it in a self-righteous way. In return, Jesus did not directly answer his question.

Instead, Jesus redirected his question. Jesus demonstrated to these people that they must first be concerned about their own salvation. The question ought not to be a self-righteous judgment of others. Instead, in humility, "**will I go to heaven?**"

Jesus redirects the people of the crowd from looking out and judging others to examining themselves. They were to be concerned first and foremost with their own spiritual well-being. They were to be concerned with their own eternity. This is because the door to heaven is narrow.

After having redirected the question from "**will _____ go to heaven?**" to "**will I go to heaven?**," Jesus tells a story that combats the false perceptions regarding salvation of his day. Jesus does this to warn and direct the people to the proper place.

In Jesus' story, a master, who was hosting a feast, closes the door to his home. First, this demonstrates that a time will come when people can no longer enter. We know this is on Judgment Day. When Jesus returns to judge, his judgment will be final. People will not get a second chance. You will not get a second chance.

After the door had been shut, people came to the master's home. They asked him to open the door for them. But he says that he does not know these people. They thought that they deserved to be in his home. Yet, the master did not let them into his feast.

After he rejects their request to enter his feast, the people devise why the master should let them into his home. In their defense, these people point to their outward association with him. They say they ate and drank with him. Yet, he responds again that they will not enter. He tells them to leave.

In this story, Jesus combatted two reasons why people of his day may have wrongly thought they deserved to go to heaven. The first was their outward association with religious things. They went to the temple. They celebrated the feasts. They observed the ceremonial laws. Wouldn't these things be enough to save them? Jesus' answer was no.

The second reason upon which the people may have relied was their heritage. They were children of Abraham. They were God's chosen nation. They had the right lineage... the right pedigree. Wouldn't this be enough to save them? Jesus' answer was no.

To those who looked toward who they were and what they had done for salvation, Jesus' answer was clear. Those people would be cast to eternal condemnation. To those people, Jesus quoted Psalm 6:8, "*depart from me all you evildoers.*" Those who would rely on who they were and what they had done would be condemned.

So, how does Jesus' story apply to us? Perhaps we desire to rely on the same things to be saved. Do you ever desire to look at who you are or what you have done to find confidence in your judgment? Will you knock on the door and say, "Let me in because I am..." or "Let me in because I did..."

What are the I am's and I did's that we may look to?

Maybe your I am's are something like these. I am a member of Emmanuel Lutheran Church. I am a worker called into the ministry of the gospel. I am a so-and-so, and my grandpa built this church. Or I am a friend of Pastor so-and-so. Do you ever think that your lineage and connections are the reason to be confident?

Maybe your I did's are something like these. I tithe every week. I was confirmed. I served in these different ways. I sent my children to Emmanuel Lutheran School and ALA. I help out my family and my community. Do you ever think this way?

I know that these answers sound silly, and you all may think, 'who would ever think they are saved for these reasons?' Well, let's tie it back to the question, "**Will _____ go to heaven?**" When you ask the question for your loved ones, do you ever apply it to who they are and what they have done? Do you ever think, "I know my son has disconnected himself from God's Word, but he went to ELS and ALA!" "I know my sister does not confess Jesus as Lord, but she is such a

loving wife and mother.” Or “I know my neighbor is not a Christian, but he is devout and faithful.” If you are changing the standard of salvation for these people, have you or will you change it for yourselves?

The Bible is clear. The Bible makes exclusive claims. Salvation is found in no one else but Christ Jesus. If you look to anyone else... if you look to yourself... if you look to who you are or what you have done... God's judgment is upon you. As the master said to those he did not let in, God says to those who look to themselves for salvation, *“I don't know where you come from. Depart from me, all you evildoers.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown outside.”*

Therefore, brothers and sisters, look to Jesus. Here Jesus says that the door is narrow. At another time, Jesus proclaims that he is the door. Jesus said, *“I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved.”* (John 10:9)

You can be confident that you are saved because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. Jesus is the Son of God. The Father sent His Son to be your Savior. Jesus lived the perfect life that you needed. He clothed you in his righteousness. Jesus also took on the punishment that your sins deserve. Jesus died on the cross for you. Jesus rose from the grave in victory. Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil.

You do not need to ask, **“Will I go to heaven?”** You will! Jesus did it all for you. The Holy Spirit created faith in your heart to receive what Jesus has done. You are saved. You will live forever in the new heavens and the new earth with your God. You will be there with people from all nations, races, ages, and times. You will be there with people from the east and west and from the north and south. You will be there with all people who found salvation in Christ Jesus.

The Bible makes exclusive claims. Only those who look to Jesus, who he is, and what he has done, will be saved. This is a wonderful message for us, those who have been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit. Now, this motivates us to go and share the Word about Jesus. Amen.