



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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August 25, 2013

Pentecost 13

Sermon Text: [Judges 7:1-8](#)

Mr. Richard Muchka

First Lesson: [Judges 7:1-8](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 72](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 9:1-9](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 13:22-30](#)

The Believer Hears Jesus' Warnings The Door to Heaven is Narrow

"New York has Broadway. Paris, the Champs- Elysées. And Reutlingen? The provincial town in south-western Germany has Spreuerhofstrasse. The Guinness Book of World Records lists the street as the narrowest in the world, with a width of just 12.2 inches -- or approximately the width of a standard PC monitor.

There's not much to see in Spreuerhofstrasse. After all, the street is just 12.5 feet long. And it isn't particularly pretty. One has to squeeze past blank walls, and when it's raining, water drips from the gutter of an old half-timbered house on one side. But tourists from Asia and America flock to inspect the alley, adorned at each end with the sign "Narrowest street in the world" in German and English.

The city owes its record to a devastating fire and a city official who was either unfamiliar with his town or extremely slim. The blaze tore through the city in 1726, prompting the authorities to rule that buildings should have gaps between them to stop fires from spreading too quickly. Then, in 1820, a town hall administrator decided to elevate the status of this particular gap to that of a full-fledged public street."

This information comes from the website of Spiegel, a German magazine. The article goes on to detail how the street might lose its status as the narrowest in the world because one of the buildings along the "street" is slowly bulging outward. If it goes out much farther, it will lose its status as a street and go back to just being a gap.

The narrow road that Jesus spoke of in our Gospel today is greatly different than this poor gap in Germany, but the picture is important for us to remember. Some of us here today could not run down that street in Germany, some of us could. Yet not a single one of us here today can walk down the narrow path that leads to heaven on our own. You see, we are all born in sin and condemned because of our sin. To walk down the path that leads to heaven you have to be completely and absolutely free of sin. 100% holy is the only reading that is acceptable at the gate of heaven. You fail. I fail. On our own, we all fail.

We know this. That is why we are here today. We know that we need God to deliver us. We know that he has through Jesus. Jesus lived the holy life that no one is able to live. Jesus died as the punishment for all sin of all time. Jesus rose to assure us that the whole world has been declared not guilty. We also know for a certainty that the

blessing that Jesus won for the world is ours when God works the gift of faith in us. We don't decide to believe. We are born dead in sin. Dead people don't make decisions. We don't earn God's love or forgiveness. Dead people are not able to earn anything.

Right about now you might be thinking, "I know all that. Besides, what in the world does any of this have to do with Gideon's gutted army?" Don't worry, we'll get there. This week Jesus warns us not to take for granted what we "know." The door to heaven is narrow. It is entirely dependent upon God. But we are prone to want to give ourselves too much credit. Even if it is only in the dark corners of our mind, even if we would never dare to say it out loud, we are all prone, on various levels, to want to credit ourselves. The story of Gideon reminds us that God wants us to know that he is the One that does all the work. He did it in delivering Israel under Gideon. He does it in delivering us from hell. Don't ever forget it. When you do, you are off the path.

The period of Judges was a dark period in the history of Israel. They had conquered the promised land but failed to follow all of God's commands. They got tired of battles and quit attacking the Canaanites when they figured they could live safely in the same area. That plan blew up in their face. By the time of Gideon, the Midianites were regularly plundering the crops of God's people. In fact, one of the first times we meet Gideon he was threshing wheat at the bottom of a wine press. He was trying to hide his harvest so the Midianites wouldn't steal it.

Shortly after this the "Angel of the Lord" (the pre-incarnate Christ) came and called Gideon to service. Gideon was described as a "mighty warrior" by Jesus. But he probably didn't feel like it. He was living in fear. No doubt he knew of the victories God have given Israel in the past, but now he was living in fear and whining about how God let it happen. After Gideon finally realized he was talking to God and God demonstrated his power to him, Gideon carried out his first task. He destroyed his father's altar to Baal. This shows you how failing to carry out God's commands hurt God's people. When the town wanted to kill him for doing it, Gideon replied, "If Baal is a God, let him take care of me." So from then on they called him "Jerub-Baal" which means, "Let Baal contend with him."

The Lord had sent a prophet who told the people they were suffering because of their disobedience. Now the Lord was going to act in grace and deliver his disobedient people. They were still sinful. But God's grace is bigger than our sin.

God wanted the Israelites to know it was his strength, not theirs, that would win the battle. God knows how prone people of all ages are to overestimate their own ability. If the Israelites go around patting themselves on the back, they will not focus on God, his commands, and more importantly, his promises.

So God gutted Gideon's army. First he had Gideon tell the 32,000 soldiers, "If anyone is scared and doesn't want to go to war, go home." So 22,000 leave. Cutting your army's strength by 2/3 as a way to win a battle is probably not a required course at West Point. But in God's classroom, there was still a bigger lesson to teach. This time

God had them drink water. I don't think the way they drank water made them inherently better warriors. What it did do was to allow God to cut the 10,000 down to 300. God used under 1% of the original fighting force to destroy the enemies of God's people. No one could say after the battle that "we" won. They had to admit, "God won." That was the point. Don't rely on yourself. Rely on God. God's power wins the most important battles in life.

That is true for us also. God's power delivered us from sin, as we outlined earlier. The problem is we are very prone to forget that. We can easily become impressed with our own spiritual strength. We would never say out loud that our spiritual strength does anything. But our attitudes betray the truth that this thought lives in us at times.

For example, have you ever thought to yourself, "If more people in the congregation worshiped/served/gave (fill in your own blank here) like I do, we would not have so many challenges!" There's a lot of "I" in that thought. There is not a lot of "God" in that sentiment. Are we really so arrogant as to think that we accomplish things through our ability? YES, of course we are! We are sinners! We think at various times that God is lucky to have us serving him so well. We bounce from arrogance to despair all the time in our Christian lives, depending on which attack Satan is launching at the time.

The problem is that when I become spiritually arrogant I am taking my eyes off of Jesus. I have forgotten he is the power source for any good thing that I do in God's eyes. With my focus off of Jesus, I naturally give myself too much credit because I am a sinner. When I start crediting myself at all, I am in severe danger of falling off the narrow path. There is no room on the narrow path to heaven for any of our egos to walk hand in hand with Jesus. Either he works everything in us and through us or we are falling off the path.

Many times when this biblical truth is presented, people respond that "It is not fair. It's not fair if I serve God more than someone else and they are forgiven through faith in Jesus just like I am." You know God isn't fair. You know that you don't want him to be fair. If he is fair, you should go to hell. But it still rankles us sometimes, doesn't it? You want God to send some Midianites into the lives of those who seem apathetic to the Gospel at times, don't you? This is the beautiful, amazing thing about our God. Sometimes you and I become petty about these things. We pout. We sin against God when we do it. But God is, and always will be, bigger than our pettiness. The God who paved the way to heaven with his Son's blood is so big that he does it all to save the apathetic and the arrogant alike. When the apathetic and arrogant see how they stand forgiven through Jesus, they rejoice. The mark of a truly maturing Christian is when they rejoice that God loves others as much as he loves them. When you see that attitude in your own life, thank God that he is keeping you on the narrow path.

The way to heaven is a narrow path. But the God who made the path is bigger and more loving than any of us on it. The closer we walk to him, the more we hear and follow his warnings, the more like him we will become.