

Being Saved: Coming Home

by Stewart Ruch

To be saved, one must come to Jesus in a state of vulnerability and humility, letting go of security and identity and choosing to follow Him.

Duration: 23:39

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14, Matthew 10:34, Luke 12:51, Luke 13:24, John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:9

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, Bishop Stuart Ruch explores the concept of leaving the world in the same way we entered it. He emphasizes the vulnerability and helplessness of newborns, drawing a parallel to how we will leave this world when we die. The sermon highlights the importance of understanding this truth intellectually and emotionally, and how it relates to salvation. Bishop Ruch uses the metaphor of coming home to illustrate the process of getting saved, emphasizing the role of Jesus as the loving and responsible leader.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruch and is part three of our Lent 2016 series. There's a very stirring and stark statement given in the Hebrew Scriptures in the Old Testament that says this.

Human beings will leave the world in the same way they came into the world. Human beings will leave the world in the same way they came into the world. Which is to say that as we came in as newborns, stripped down and absolutely vulnerable.

So we will, when the day of our death comes, when our last hour comes, so we will leave this world stripped down and vulnerable. And when you think of a newborn and the profound sort of exposure of that newborn, the incredible helplessness of a newborn, it's a sobering and stark thought to take in that we started that way. Every single human being started that way.

And that every single human being will finish their life that way. We will leave the world the same way we came in. Now, I've been studying this passage from Luke chapter 13 for many days now.

It's a stark passage. I've wrestled pastorally with how to bring it to you and how to teach it. There's just no way around it.

I've felt a little bit. There are old paintings of philosophers sort of back in the day and they would sometimes be holding a skull, a human skull and looking at it. Just kind of reflecting on the reality of death.

And I have to say, I feel that way a little bit this morning with you all. Come, let's look at a skull together. Because that's really what Jesus is teaching toward.

He is teaching toward the hour that will come for every single human being, which is the hour of our death, our last hour. And then when that time comes, He wants us to be prepared. He wants us to be understanding with great clarity what it means and how it is we come to be saved by the hour of our death.

So we follow our leader. We follow Jesus. If you are new to Christianity or you're not a believer yet, this is actually an incredible opportunity for you to see how Christians think.

And the way in which during a season, we call this season Lent, we're preparing for Easter, but we're reflecting on the reality of our mortality. We're reflecting on the question of how it is that we're saved. Christians do heavy lifting sometimes.

We do hard, challenging, thinking and emotional, spiritual work. Our Master, Jesus, asks that of us. Jesus is being asked a question in Luke chapter 13.

And the question is a quantitative question. Will few be saved? That's the question to ask Jesus. And in this Q&A opportunity, what Jesus does is decide how He's going to answer the question.

And rather than answering it with the question being a how many, how many will be saved. Indeed, He seems to have a different interest. He has a different concern.

His concern is not so much speculative philosophy or theology. Let me tell you how many will be saved. But let me instead go to your heart, to your life and say how you can be saved.

The question is how many. The answer is how. And at the heart of Jesus is how.

Is it the only way to be saved? The only way to come into the Jesus house, the Jesus family, is stripped down and vulnerable. The only way to come. And when you come that way, you only have so much time to make that choice.

Only one way to come, stripped down and vulnerable. And you only have so much time to make that choice. A door is going to shut.

And those who have not chosen to be a part of the Jesus house will not be able to get in. Let's study this together. You'll need your bulletin or if you brought a Bible or you're going to pull it up on your device.

However it is, get with Luke 13, please. Jesus was asked this question, it's a how many question. And then we see in verse 24, He gives an answer.

A how answer. Strive to enter through the narrow door. That's a really important sentence, let's work on it.

Here's what I want to ask you to do though. My guess is when you hear that sentence, there's one word that you have just emotionally or intellectually highlighted with your invisible highlighter. And that's narrow.

This is the sentence about narrow, is what you're thinking. Alright, let's be fair to the sentence, let's be fair to Jesus before we go there. Because you're thinking narrow and you have certain impressions of narrow

and what narrow people are like and what narrow organizations are like or whatever.

Before you go to the adjective, let's let the adjective be the adjective. It actually isn't the heart of the sentence. Alright, let's find our verb.

Where is it? Right at the beginning. Strive. Oh, that's a highlighted word actually.

Strive to enter a door. Another very important word, the object of the striving. So actually to get this sentence and to get the meaning of what Jesus is teaching, we have to discipline ourselves in our emotional responses to what He says and let Him say what He's saying, which is strive to enter a door.

It is a narrow door and we'll speak to narrow. It's a very important word. By the way, when I started studying this passage, I didn't like that word.

I just didn't like it emotionally. By the way, it's okay to figure out what you feel emotionally about Bible verses. I didn't like it.

I don't like narrow. I like broad. I like wide.

I like creativity. Now I love it. Now I love this word.

I'll explain why. Okay. Let's work on strive.

Excuse me. Work on door first. Strive to enter the door.

Door is giving us the image of a house. And we actually read that there's a master of the house. There's somebody who leads the family.

We have a home. We have a house. We have a beautiful image actually of coming into someone's home.

And there's a master of the house. And like we all do at the end of our day, for most of us at least, we lock up our house. It's a way of securing our sense of our roommate's life together, our community life together, our family life together.

It's a secure sense actually. And there's a responsible and loving master of the house. Jesus is telling the story, but he's also the hero of the story.

So he's the main leader of the story. He tells the story because he wants you to understand this intellectually and emotionally. He wants to speak to your mind and your heart.

So he uses a story to get into your heart. And he's saying, here is how you get saved. You come home.

What better image, Jesus is saying, can I give you than to understand how to get saved? It's coming home. That's what it means to get saved. Is you come home and there's a master of the house.

It's a family. It's the Jesus house. It's the Jesus family.

And once you're in that door, you are completely and totally home. You know the rhythms of home. You can have bed head and wear your pajamas all day long.

It's like being a five-year-old for the rest of your life. That's what my five-year-old does. We say, Becca, you should get dressed.

Why, are we going somewhere? If you're not going somewhere, you wear your pajamas all day. I mean, it's pajama living in the house of Jesus. You are yourself for better and for worse.

You don't have to be pretty. You don't have to be dashing. You're in the house with a really responsible, really loving master of the house.

It's so good. It's so good. Some of you I know pastor, well, they can't get there.

You didn't grow up in a house like that. Some of you have had experiences like that. You've had roommate experiences or community experiences.

Maybe even here at Rez. It's so good to be in a family, to be in a house, to be in a community like that. That's what salvation is like.

That's how you get saved. There's a beautiful poetic song by a band, Over the Rhine. And the song is called, Called Home.

And it's a beautiful song. It talks about home and captures images of home. Let me just read you a couple of these poetic lines.

Just shy of breaking down, there's a bend in the road that I have found called home. Take a left at loneliness, there's a place to find forgiveness called home. Leave behind your Sunday best, you know we could care less.

Our body's motion comes to rest when we are at last called home. Our body's motion comes to rest when not wearing our Sunday best. We're home.

There's a door. It leads to the Jesus house. But the door is narrow.

The door is narrow. Because to enter the Jesus house, you can't bring anything but your stripped down, vulnerable self. The door is narrow because you can't carry with you the things of security that you've developed through this life.

Securities that are blessings to you. Securities that are really good things but that will never, ever save you. The reason the door is narrow is because Jesus is saying you have to come into the door the same way you came into this world.

You have to come in stripped down. You have to come in absolutely vulnerable. You may find your family a great place of security.

You may have a great connection with your mom or your dad or your siblings or extended family. But you know when you come into the Jesus house, you can't come in with them. You can't bring the security of your family with you.

Jesus actually taught this in chapter 12 of Luke. He said, I need to come and families will be divided because of me. Brothers and sisters will be divided.

Moms and dads. Sons and daughters will be divided because of me. Because you have to come on your own.

We often and rightly berate a wrong-headed American individualism. But there's a biblical individualism that says that every human person ultimately has to answer to God. Will they come in stripped down? Will they come in vulnerable? Will they leave everything at that door and walk through that narrow door? That's all Jesus needs from you.

That's all he needs. He'll take that and he'll transform you. But it's narrow.

There's an image earlier. I know the story they tell us in Luke. Of a man who's done a great job saving.

He's gained a great deal of wealth. And he's been very, very disciplined. He's been very, very focused.

And he saved all of this. And he says in the story, oh, what a relief. I can eat, drink and be merry.

I've done all my saving. I've been so disciplined and so careful. He's an amazing American.

And God says to him, you fool. For tonight you will die and your life will be required of you. In other words, savings, that was his security.

That's what he was going to make sure was not only a blessing but a salvation. Those who are hearing this story say, wait, wait, wait, Jesus. Do you see what they say? Verse 26, we ate and drank in your presence.

We had table fellowship. We had community together. You taught in our streets.

Very likely those who are hearing this are Israelites. They're saying, we're Israelites. So that's our security.

That's how we'll enter the Jesus house. Because we're Israelites. Don't all Israelites enter the Jesus house? And even to them Jesus is saying, no.

No, you have to come in the narrow door. That wonderful gift of your ethnicity, that wonderful gift of your background, that wonderful gift of your religious heritage, whatever it might be. It's a wonderful gift.

It's a blessing. It will not get you saved. There's only one way to be saved, stripped down, vulnerable.

That's how you get into the Jesus house. And he says there are many who won't come in. They're too afraid to be stripped down.

They're too afraid to lose what has been a securing identity reality, their family, their work, their integrity. I may not have much, but I've got my integrity. I'll bring my integrity with me through the door.

That will impress Jesus. I had a friend in her 20s, and she was a part of the New York City club scene then. And she described to me an evening in New York City getting into these clubs.

And she said about 2 in the morning is when they would really begin to become busy. And they changed almost every week the popular place to be, and you had to kind of know where to go. And she said you would stand in line.

There would be 100 people standing outside of these doors. And one of the leaders of the club would come out, and it was primarily with the women, and they would line the women up, and they would go down, and they would choose the women that had the attraction they particularly wanted, the body type, the clothes, and they would say, Yeah, you can come in. No, no, no, no, no, no.

Yeah, you. You can come in. You can come in.

See, that's how the world does this. That may not be that explicit, but maybe it's a club, and you're hoping that someone says, You can come into intellectual club. You're smart enough.

You can come in the artistic club. You're creative enough. You can come in the whatever club that you don't want to be a part of club because you're against clubs club.

You can come in. You're against clubs club. You can come in.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You've got the right look, the right attitude, the right deal. See, but Jesus doesn't work that way.

Let's not be confused. Let's expose a lie of the enemy in the culture. The elitism is not in the kingdom of God.

The elitism is in the culture. The intolerance is at the heart of the culture that says you must merit introduction and being brought in. You must display it in some way.

You must bring with you everything that you have somehow earned, and then that way you can give, and to that Jesus says, Absolutely not. Any ethnic background comes in through my door, north, south, east, west. As a matter of fact, those who seem so impressive, they'll be last.

If they will strip down and get vulnerable, they can come in, but they'll be last, and the first will be those that you thought were absolutely last. That's how it works in the kingdom of God. There's no place for elitism.

He says it is the company of the vulnerable. It's the company of the stripped down who says, Jesus, take all this. All I have is me.

It's all I've got. Take it. That's what Jesus says is the Jesus house.

So become stripped down. Become vulnerable. And we need to come in such a way that we don't wait too long because there will be a time when it's too late to enter the Jesus house.

I had to go back and study this again just to make sure scripturally that I was giving you what the Bible bears witness to, and it is all throughout the scriptures. This is why Jesus wants to be really clear because he's a good master of the house. He doesn't want anyone to be surprised like, What? I had no idea there was a time limit on this.

He's saying, No, no, no. I want everyone to know. I want you to know how to get in by striving to get in the door.

And I want you to know that there's a time limit on when you can get in the door. What's the time limit? When does the time limit pass? When you die. When you die.

Prior to that, because we're talking about a communion relationship with Jesus, a close and intimate relationship with Jesus, like any close intimate relationship, you have to choose that relationship. You have to be highly intentional. It mattered that at some point I asked Catherine to marry me very intentionally.

There was no fuzzy thinking for me like, Oh, you know, maybe if I just hang around with her enough, we'll just be married someday. I don't know. It's just kind of fuzzy.

We're super fuzzy thinking about this issue. If we're believers or if we're not believers yet. I don't know.

It just kind of happens. You just kind of end up with Jesus. Everyone's just going to kind of end up with Jesus.

Isn't that how it works? No, that's not how it works. Don't be deceived. That's not how it works.

Everyone does not end up with Jesus. The stripped down vulnerable, they end up with Jesus. And when the day of our death comes, we will have needed to choose which family we're a part of.

That's why Jesus says, not, I don't know you. He says, I don't know where you're from. I don't know what family you're from.

You're not a part of my family. I don't know what family you're from. You're choosing family now.

And we don't know when we're going to die. We don't know when that day will come. I'll be really clear.

We're told in the Bible there's actually two judgments, and we need to understand this clearly. There is first what's called the final judgment, or the last judgment. That's a judgment that will come at the end of time.

Matthew chapter 25 teaches about the final judgment. Our creed is what we say every week to capture what we believe. We'll say Jesus will judge the living and the dead.

That refers to the final judgment. That's at the end of time. But then there's another judgment, which is at the end of our lives.

The final judgment is cosmic. The judgment at the end of our lives is personal. We're told it's appointed once for a human being to die, Hebrews chapter 9, and then the judgment.

We're told by this figure in the story who had all that he had saved, your life will be required of you tonight. You must give witness to your life. You'll be judged for what family you chose.

Martin Luther, a 16th century Christian thinker, put it this way, each of us has his own last day when he dies. So let me just be really clear with any of you who have not yet become part of the Jesus house, because you're searching. You're here because you want to know more.

There are many of you at res, and you are very welcome. I need to be clear that you don't have forever to choose Jesus. You have your lifetime, and you don't know how long your lifetime will be.

For those of us who have people that we love dearly, and I hope you all have many in your workplace, your neighborhood, your family, who have not chosen to go through the narrow door, stripped down, I think this is a word that is here to awaken us. We as preachers in America often don't want to pressure our folks too much, and I think that overall that's right, because God is deeply and profoundly sovereign, and he's working all things for good. At the same time, after studying a passage like this, I'm not sure I'd be pastoring well if I didn't also say, though, oh, this is a wake-up, this is an alert message for those that we love who maybe just need to be invited into the Jesus house, invited to repent, which I'll teach about much more next week, and receive Jesus.

For almost 20 years we met in a high school, and part of that was we built relationships with the custodians. They were wonderful men and women, and it was one gentleman, Joe, that wasn't his real name, who served us for many years, and he'd get his job done. And he'd sit in the back, and he just would listen to what we were doing at the church.

And one day, one of our leaders, Father Keith Hartzell, said, Stuart, we should just talk to Joe. I don't know if he knows Jesus. So Keith and I went to Joe and said, would you be interested in talking with us about receiving Jesus? You've been listening to Jesus's teachings for a couple of years.

He said, I'd love to hear more about that. We walked upstairs, put three chairs in the hallway, and I said, well, Joe, here's how you can receive Jesus and come into his house. You repent of your sin.

You can open your heart. You can say, come, Jesus Christ. Come, Holy Spirit.

He said, I didn't know I could do that. I'd love to pray with you and Keith. And we prayed for him to receive Jesus.

He came into the house stripped down, vulnerable. Jesus took him from there. There may be somebody you just need to invite.

Their relationship is there. You've got their relationship. You just need to invite them.

You know that Jesus doesn't call us to come into a house that he himself hasn't come into first. As the master of the house, he too entered the house stripped down and vulnerable. As the master of the house, he humbled himself on the cross.

He gave up all that he had. He even knew a disconnection from his Father in heaven. He left everything behind, and he walked through that narrow door stripped down and vulnerable.

And because he walked through first, he knows the way through. He's on the other side. And he calls us stripped down and vulnerable to walk through and then to do as he has done and call others stripped down and vulnerable.

A beautiful statement from a thinker named St. John of the Cross from the 1600s said, in the evening of our life, we'll be called to give an account of our love. Our love for the Lord Jesus. Our love for those who have not known the Lord Jesus.

Come. Come stripped down. Come vulnerable.

And don't wait too long for those who are not in the Jesus house. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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