

## 37. The Narrow Door

Luke 13:22-35

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

In his narrative on the life of Christ, Luke now brings our attention to Jesus' teaching in different towns and villages in the southern part of the nation of Israel, i.e. the area of Judea and the environs of Jerusalem. A very pertinent question comes forth from one of those listening to His teaching.

<sup>22</sup>Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, <sup>24</sup>"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. <sup>25</sup>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.' <sup>26</sup>"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' <sup>27</sup>"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' <sup>28</sup>"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. <sup>29</sup>People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup>Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" (Luke 13:22-30).

### Are There Only a Few Who Will Be Saved?

I was converted to Christ in 1977 after I was asked the question, "Are you saved?" When the question was posed to me, I was a rebellious, long-haired, marijuana-smoking hippie, following my own path, and not knowing the plan of salvation. I was intrigued by the question, but I did not know the significance of it or how to answer. I liked to think that I was "on the fence" when it came to Jesus. Sure, he was a great teacher, but that was all He was to me then. I did not understand my need of a Savior, but I knew that I wanted my life to be different. I fell far short of the person I wanted to be, but what does it mean to be saved, I wondered? Saved from what?

In one of the towns on the way to Jerusalem, a man asked a similar question of Christ, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" Before we look at Jesus' response, we must ponder about what is meant by the word *saved*. If you were to listen to many preachers today, you might get the thought that we are to be saved from a life that is unfocused. Some would say that we are to be saved from a life of unhappiness and that God wants us to have our best life now while we live in this world. The focus of those preachers is to make a better you. However, that was not and is not the focus of Jesus.

He does not want to give us a new, improved version of ourselves but, rather, a new life altogether that comes from Him. We are to be born from above! (John 3:3). From what are we to be saved? We are to be saved from the punishment and judgment of God. I know that thought may shock you, but that was what Jesus said in Luke's Gospel, chapter twelve, verses 58-59. It is the passage about getting things right with your adversary while you are on the way before

reaching the place of judgment. That was also the focus by Jesus when twice He told them that, unless they repent, they too would perish (Luke 12:3-5). The Lord wants that none should perish, but that we would meet God as our Savior and be reconciled to Him on the road of life (2 Corinthians 5:19). We are to do it before we meet God as our judge. The fact that we are to be reconciled to God may come as news to you. You see, I did not know that God and I were “at odds.” In fact, I rarely thought of God at all, and if you asked me back then, I would not have seen myself as an enemy of God (Colossians 1:21). However, the reality is that there is no “fence” on which to sit. We are all in need of a Savior, whether we understand it or not.

The Lord personalizes the question. We are not to be thinking about others as to how many will be saved. Our focus should be on ourselves in order to make sure that we are there. This is personal to each one of us. I would encourage every reader to take this passage to heart. Jesus answers the man’s question by talking to the crowd of listeners (the answer is spoken with a plural verb), saying that they, and us, should *make every effort* to enter through the narrow door.

The English King James Version translates the Greek word *agōnizomai* with the word *strive* to describe how we are to enter the Kingdom of God. The New International Version translates it as “make every effort.” This Greek word is where we get our English word *agony*. In the common early Greek language, the word meant to “engage in an athletic contest” and then “to fight, or struggle.” The word is used of wrestling in prayer (Colossians 4:12) and in “fighting the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). This Greek word is also used of Jesus when He was before Pontius Pilate when Christ said: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would **fight** to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders” (John 18:36). Jesus used the word to describe the effort that we are to put into entering the Kingdom of God. We are to agonize or fight over entering through the narrow door. So, the question arises, “Over what are we to agonize?”

Question 1) Why would Jesus use this word to describe how we are to enter the Kingdom of God? Against whom are we striving? Why does Jesus liken salvation to entering at a narrow door?

The fight that we go through is the fight against self. Yes, there is opposition from the evil one, but our principal enemy is our lower, primal nature. We are prideful and selfish creatures, and this part of our nature that we inherited from Adam must be conquered if we are to accept God’s salvation on His terms. This was about what God warned Cain before he murdered his brother Abel, i.e. that our sin nature desires to consume us:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7).

The only way we can rule over our sin nature is to bring it to the cross of Christ and die to self. From that point onward, we are to live with discipline and effort in order to rule over our inner lives in the way of Christ. This way of Christ is a narrow entrance. Matthew records Jesus as saying, “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). All your faculties should be spent in searching out the Lord Jesus Christ because through Him alone are we able to enter the Kingdom of God.

If you were to go to Bethlehem, Israel, to visit the place where Jesus was born, the entrance door is so small that one must bend down to get in. I was told when I visited that the reason it was so small was that in the Middle Ages, horsemen would ride in, kill and steal, and ride out again before much could be done to stop them. They countered it by making the door so small that one had to take off everything to enter.

In earlier times, the large city gates were shut at troublesome times and during the night, and a deliberately small gate that was easily defended was the only entrance. To get in through that small narrow door, merchants had to unload their camels or mules. Perhaps, that is why Jesus is referring to the entrance as a narrow door. Those who enter the Kingdom of God must find the narrow entrance, unload themselves of their sin, and die to self to be a disciple. We leave all behind to embrace the new life Christ offers. This takes humility and willingness to relinquish that which would keep us from entering in through the narrow door. The Kingdom of God is not found by going the way most people go, “the broad road,” that Jesus mentions (Matthew 7:13).

In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

It is not an easy way. We must make every effort to go God’s way rather than the way of religion, good works, or giving, which are all a system of works, a deception of the enemy of our souls. The way of Christ is to abandon oneself into the hands of a gracious and loving, trustworthy Savior, Who alone has paid the price for you to enter the Kingdom of God. Several times now, I have led tours to Israel. What would it be like if I were to make it cheaper for people by writing my own tickets to fly? Would the airline allow us on the flight? I don’t think so! To get on that plane, you must abide by the airline’s rules and buy the legitimate ticket. Imagine going to the Israeli checkpoint at the airport and being turned back after you have been preparing all year to tour Israel. How disappointed would people be! Now, imagine what it will be like for many who think that they will find an entrance only to find that they had the wrong ticket and were turned away at the door? Christ alone has a free ticket for you to enter.

Repentance and faith in Christ is the only way. No man can be saved if he desires to keep his sins. It is like a doctor coming to a man who is very sick. The man wants to get well, but he is not willing to give up the thing that was making him sick in the first place. How foolish would be such a person! A man should examine himself and, under the light of the Holy Spirit, be vulnerable and introspective and confess all that displeases God. Unload to the Lord every sin that you have accumulated. If there are things to get right with others, be obedient to act on it right away. We have a promise that, if we come to Christ, He will be at work in our lives! You will be a new creature! Old things are gone, and all things are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Those things that you cannot conquer in your own strength, He will give you strength to conquer as He has already won the victory over sin! As you look at your life, do not allow yourself to be deceived. If you have not yet decided for Christ, what is stopping you? Whatever you may feel you cannot let go of, is it worth holding on to? Cast yourself on Him, and He will not disappoint

you. As you look at your life, do not allow yourself to be deceived as to your condition. It is a narrow way in the sense that it requires the need to abandon self and sin.

On the hills of Judea, the shepherd watching over the sheep would build an enclosure of stones and sit at the only entrance, the shepherd himself was the door.

**I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture (John 10:9).**

Satan will tempt you to believe that there are many ways into the Kingdom of God, but the Word of God declares that Jesus is the only way; He is the Gatekeeper of the door of the sheep. He said **“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6).**

**Question 2) Have you been deceived in the past into following a broad way, a way other than the door of Christ?**

We read almost daily about radical fundamentalists who have been tricked into believing that, by committing suicide attacks and murdering people, their god is going to give them heaven for their murders. How sad! They listened to lies from religious leaders with their own agenda, and threw themselves into a cause that they thought was going to earn them eternal life, but instead, it brings eternal damnation. Many are climbing a ladder trying to get to heaven only to find that, at the end of their lives, the ladder is against the wrong wall. I think of the religious Pharisees of Jesus' day. They believed that their adherence to a strict code would gain them salvation. They were trusting in their own righteousness. However, Jesus tells the crowd that; **“There are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” (Luke 13:30).** Do you think that Jesus could have been referring to those who saw themselves as first in God's favor? The Jews certainly saw themselves as the people of God and all other people as those who did not have the favor of God. Many will be shocked in that day to be found outside the door.

### **The Door Will Be Shut**

There are two doors before us along the road of life. The first is the door of the day of our death. At our death, the place of our eternity is fixed. There is no opportunity of salvation after our death: **“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).** Concerning the other door, the One who knows the end from the beginning says that, at the time appointed by the Father, the door of salvation will be shut and not opened again. There are some teachers who say that, after the church is snatched up (commonly called the rapture), the door will stay open for those who later want to come into the Kingdom. In this passage of Scripture, though, Jesus says that, when the time comes, many will come to the door and not be able to get in. When they were knocking on the shut door, He didn't tell them to come back later. Do not make this mistake! Fight, strive, or make every effort with all your faculties to enter the right door. Do not delay, for the enemy of our souls has learned how to trick people into putting off their repentance and turning to Christ.

When that times comes, many will be knocking and pleading for the door to be opened again, but it will be to no avail. The owner of the house, a picture of God the Father, will get up and shut

the door (verse 25) just as He did when Noah entered the ark (Genesis 7:16). Jesus is the New Testament ark of God. We do not know at what point the door of salvation will be shut. Many gamble by playing a game of Russian Roulette with their spiritual lives. They spin the barrel of a spiritual, six-shot revolver and aim it at their own head. They hope that, maybe, God has lied and that there is a chance that the firing pin clicks on an empty barrel. They are gambling with time and their eternal destiny, never realizing that they are in spiritual warfare with unseen evil spirits who suggest to their minds that God would not shut them out. They compare themselves with others, saying, "I am not as bad as the next man." They are tricked by the deceiver into believing that there is another way: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12). He that trusts Christ must feel himself to be guilty and acknowledge it. A man cannot be truly saved until he is convinced of sin and feel his guilt before a holy God.

How terrible it will be for many who are expecting to enter heaven but find that they are locked out, instead. The Parable of the Ten Virgins also brings before us the fact that many who think they should get in, instead, find that the door is shut to them:

<sup>1</sup>"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup>Five of them were foolish and five were wise. <sup>3</sup>The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. <sup>4</sup>The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. <sup>5</sup>The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. <sup>6</sup>"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' <sup>7</sup>"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup>The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup>"'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup>"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. **And the door was shut.** <sup>11</sup>"Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' <sup>12</sup>"But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' <sup>13</sup>"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:1-13).

To enter through the narrow door requires humility. God has made it so easy that even a child can do it. It is not based on what one knows with the head but on a simple trust that involves the heart, the very core of one's being. It is only difficult in the sense that we want to hold onto self and not give up our sin. When we come under conviction of sin, the temptation Satan puts before us is to reform ourselves. Satan would suggest that we work harder at being a better person, but God's way is not to work at trying to make ourselves better, but to abandon self and turn to Christ's offer of payment for our sin-debt.

That's why Paul could say:

<sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

Question 3) When the door of salvation is closed, what do you imagine will be the thoughts and expressions of those who are locked out? Why were they shut out?

The owner of the house will shut the door on those that are outside. Those locked out will bang furiously on the door. There will be screams of anguish and heartfelt cries of pleading. Can you not hear their passionate screams? These people have been around the Master. They have eaten and drunk with him. They have listened to His teaching, but they did not respond to Him! They trusted in their own ticket of their works. How terribly sad! They are shut out forever from Him. The memory of lost opportunity and, perhaps, words of refusal to the offer of the Gospel shall echo in their minds throughout eternity. In Luke 16:19-31, when the Rich Man found himself in hell, he pleaded with Abraham for Lazarus to still serve him with water, for his spiritual tongue was burning, Abraham told him to remember how it was in his past life on earth. I would think that one of the worst things about being without Christ in hell will be the memories that people will recall, wishing that they had taken the opportunities that were before them in this life. Matthew's Gospel tells us:

<sup>21</sup>Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

There will be some who will claim that they had worked very hard doing things for the Lord. Some will even tell of prophesying and performing miracles. They are false professors. They are deceived into thinking their works have gained them an entrance through the door. They knew about Him, but they did not *know* Him. They had never entered an intimate relationship with the Savior. Jesus told them, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers" (Luke 13:27). There will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth (verse 28). These people are like those that attend church, hear God's word taught, but are deceived into thinking that going to church is all that needs to happen. Can I ask you, dear reader, do you have a secret history with God? Are you intimate with Him? Is He your greatest friend? I want so badly for you to know Him! May it never happen that you may read these words and yet wail at the locked door someday. The Scripture says to each of us:

"For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today. Respond to His call! I think one of the most painful things is that those locked out will see others enter the Kingdom of God who they did not think were anywhere near their equals. All over the world, God is at work, calling those who will hear and respond to His call.

<sup>28</sup>"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28-29).

Question 4) How can people be sure that they have entered the Narrow Door and have become a child of God?

### **Some immediately know the difference**

How people come into that relationship varies enormously. Some people have a very dramatic conversion experience where there is a major turnaround in a short space of time. They can tell you the exact time it happened to them. My experience was very much like that. I was challenged and responded at the age of twenty-six, and my life was turned upside down at that point after searching for God for around four to five years.

### **For others, it is more gradual**

Others have a conversion over a gradual period. Each of my children were challenged when the time was right for them and responded at a very early age. They have grown up in church, but they probably cannot remember the date and time they became a child of God. Suppose that you travel from Boston, Massachusetts, to Cincinnati, Ohio, by Greyhound Bus. I did once, and it took twenty-three hours. I did not know when I crossed into Ohio, but I knew I was in Ohio. Some people would know the place and the time where the bus crossed into Ohio. However, it doesn't matter at what point or what time you crossed; what matters is that you are in Ohio. What matters is that you know that you are a Christian today.

### **When we receive Christ, we become children of God.**

“All who received him he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

All who receive Christ come into a relationship as close as a son with his good, loving father. Have you sincerely turned to Christ and asked Him to forgive your sins and given Him ruler ship over your life from this point onward? The Bible promises that those who respond in such a way have crossed over from death to life.

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).

### **What if people do not feel any different after entering through the Narrow Door?**

Think about it in terms of a relationship, for example, marriage. When a couple marry, they commit their lives to each other. If they were to wake up the next morning feeling like they were not married, all they had to do was to look at the legal document, their wedding certificate, to know that they are married. In the same way, a young Christian can look at the legal terms of the contract or covenant in the Bible to remind themselves of what God has said He would do.

God wants us to be sure of that relationship.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

It's possible to know that you have ETERNAL LIFE. Eternal life is defined as living in a relationship with God. “This is life eternal, that they may know you, the One True God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

Luke carries on in his narrative by talking about some of the opposition Christ was enduring:

### **Jesus' Sorrow for Jerusalem**

<sup>31</sup>At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." <sup>32</sup>He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' <sup>33</sup>In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! <sup>34</sup>"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! <sup>35</sup>Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Luke 13:31-35).

Question 4) Let us examine the warning of the Pharisee in verse 31: "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." What do you think could have been the motive behind this warning given to Jesus? What does Jesus' answer show us?

Perhaps, they were concerned for Jesus' safety, warning Him of Herod's plans. He was also getting closer to Jerusalem, the religious seat of the day, so I think that it is more than likely, though, that their motive was to intimidate Christ into leaving the town or village where He was teaching. He was disturbing the Pharisee's with His words. He was getting too close to home, and they were convicted that they were, indeed, false professors, especially after hearing that some would be locked out. Jesus had no fear of Herod, whatsoever. William Barclay in his commentary on the Book of Luke writes:

It takes a brave man to call the reigning king a fox. Latimer was once preaching in Westminster Abbey in England, when Henry the king was one of the congregation. In the pulpit, he soliloquized, "Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The king of England is here!" Then he went on, "Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of Kings is here." Jesus took His orders from God, and he would not shorten his work by one day to please or to escape any earthly king. <sup>1</sup>

Jesus then goes on to talk about his passion for the city of Jerusalem.

Isn't a hug the most wonderful expression of intimacy? Both of my children have grown up with hugs and kisses from their parents. I love to wrap my arms around them and draw them close to my heart. Isn't that what we see in Jesus in this passage? The mere thought of Jerusalem comes to His mind, and He finds within Himself that same yearning for His people, viz. you and me. Jerusalem is the city of the Great King, Messiah Jesus. Jerusalem is special to God; it is the place where He has chosen for His presence always to be resident.

**In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever (2 Kings 21:7).**

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<sup>1</sup> The Daily Study Bible, William Barclay, The Book of Luke, page 186.

There is a yearning that is described in the Parable of the Lost Son (Prodigal Son, Luke 15: 11 ff.). It is the longing of a father to run to his son and throw his arms around him and say “Welcome home, son!” Isn’t it time that you came home?

Is there any reason why you could not this moment abandon self and sin and turn to the Master of the house right now as you are reading this? It is no coincidence that you have come across this study. Perhaps, God has planned to call you to Himself through these meditations. Cast yourself upon the mercy of God. “**Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!**” (Romans 10:13). Jesus, God in the flesh, has come to Earth to take upon Himself your sin and my sin. In His justice, God must judge sin, but He did so by taking the punishment for sin upon Himself.

When Christ died on the cross, it was in place of guilty man. He died a substitutionary death. There is a penalty that God placed on sin. Jesus came as a sacrificial lamb that God has judged in your place. God freely offers eternal life as a gift to whosoever believes and entrusts his life to Christ. God loves you so much that Jesus took your place so that you can turn your life around and receive power from Him to live a God-pleasing life. Will you enter the narrow gate now? You could pray a simple heartfelt prayer to Him right now, such as:

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying in my place as my substitute. I turn from my sin. Please forgive me for the heartache I have caused You and others. Come into my life and change me. Help me to live a life that is pleasing to You. I receive You now as my Savior and Lord, Amen.

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