



Luke 13:22-30

Strive to enter through the Narrow Gate

22 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.

23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them,

24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25 "When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

26 "then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

27 "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

28 "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

29 "They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.

30 "And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

If you've done any personal evangelism or witnessing for the faith, then you've undoubtedly run up against objections against the "narrowness" or "exclusivity" of the gospel.

The moment you begin to quote say the words of Christ in say John 14:6 ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*** Or perhaps the simple declaration of Peter regarding Jesus in Acts 4:12 ***"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** You are almost inevitably confronted with an objection along the lines of, "Oh so you are saying that all good Buddhists go to Hell! How narrow of you."

While there are a host of potential answers you can give in that circumstance, I think they essentially boil down to two options:

1) The first option is to directly answer the objection raised by the person you are witnessing to. So you start talking in terms of whether there really is in an absolute sense any such thing as a "good Buddhist" or you begin to address the truth claims of Buddhism and so on. But I personally don't think that's the right approach

2) The second option is to see the objection for what it really is, an attempt to shift the conversation away from the person themselves, to less threatening ground where the emphasis is on theory. You'll almost inevitably find that it is the case with the unsaved, that they don't want to discuss eternal questions in terms of themselves and their own final estate. They feel far more comfortable with

general discussions of religion. [Then again, that isn't only the case with the unsaved, when you do pastoral visitations you quickly find that Christians would rather have a discussion about Christianity generally than how they are personally doing in the Christian faith.] But don't let the unbeliever do that, say something along the lines of ***"Lets set aside everyone else for a moment. What about you? That's who I'm interested in. You heard the words of Christ in John 14:6, how do you respond?"***

I think that's the better approach, because it seems to me that again and again that refocusing on the hearer is precisely what Jesus did. You remember how when Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4, how when the conversation began to uncomfortably personal for her, she tried to shift the attention away to a broad discussion of the differences between how and where Jews and Samaritans worshipped. Jesus doesn't at that point break off into a discussion of the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam with an erudite explanation of how the northern tribes instituted a false system of worship that was perpetuated by their Samaritan descendents. Not at all! Jesus keeps the question focused on salvation, focused on the individual, and how the Father is seeking true worshippers and how there is a pressing need for all people hearing His gospel to decide ***now. the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."***

Jesus does essentially the same thing in these verses in Luke 13. As he is going through the villages of the transjordan inexorably making his way towards Jerusalem and the betrayal and execution that He has been warning His disciples must come in order for the salvation promised in the scriptures to be accomplished, someone asks a similarly broad question, ***"are there few that are saved?"***

Again, Jesus doesn't answer "That's a great question. I suppose it depends on your perspective. Are you talking in terms of the total number who will be saved in all time and from all nations – in other words the sum total of the elect, the invisible church, because viewed that way we are talking about ***"a great multitude which no one could number"*** but if your perspective happens to be the elect as compared to the sum total of *all* men who have been or will be born, then one must admit that while ***many are called few are chosen.*** So I suppose the answer is no in one sense and yes in another."

Instead Jesus in his answer turns the dialogue back from theory to the application of the gospel to the heart of the questioner. He commands the questioner: ***Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*** Strive to enter into heaven. ***STRIVE*** - ἀγωνίζεσθε From this word we get our English *agonize*, Heaven will not be given to any but those who contend earnestly for it.

So Andy, does that mean that we enter by our own works, by our own efforts? I thought we didn't believe that men save themselves? What? Did you drink the Arminian coffee by accident this morning?

Not at all. Eternal life is the gift of God, and in our natural condition of spiritual blindness we will never even find the door that Jesus speaks of . It is like the situation that occurred in Sodom, when the wicked men of the city attempted to enter into the Lot's home and take his guests, who were angels appearing as men, by force:

Gen. 19:10 But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door.

11 And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door.

We will never find the door unless our eyes are spiritually opened, unless like Paul, the Holy Spirit removes the scales from our spiritual eyes. Even then, when our eyes are opened though we strive, though we run, it is God who is working in us to will and to do: ***Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;***

13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

God changes our hearts, God removes our blindness, God reveals the door, God gives us the desire to enter in.

*But once that desire is in your heart, you will, you must strive to enter in by the **Narrow Gate**, that is we enter into salvation **ONLY** through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the only way.*

Jesus warns you that there is a striving to enter into salvation that is in vain, ***many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*** This wrong seeking can fall into two categories:

1) The first is Seeking to Enter by the wrong way. There is the answer to those asking you about the good Buddhists.

Imagine that a father took a priceless treasure, and he showed it to his children, and then he locked it away from thieves in his safe, this safe only had one key. And the father put that key on a table, and told his children that all they needed to do to obtain that treasure was to take up that key from the table and open the safe. But instead of doing that, the children went out and collected other keys wherever they could one after another, and they tried to open the safe with them, and of course none of them worked. Eventually some of the kids said to themselves, I bet there really isn't a treasure and sat down in a huff, while others just pretended the safe was open and that they had the treasure already, while others just kept trying and trying. Then someone came and said, "Look none of the things you are doing are going to get you that treasure, only that key on the table opens the safe." But how did they answer? ***"That's too narrow! I want my own key to work, not Dad's! It isn't fair!"*** **Discussing the merits of the other keys, how big they are, how shiny they are, how complex, will never change the fact that they don't open the safe!**

2) The second is seeking to enter at the wrong time, when it is too late

Have you ever been suddenly hit by a stunning realization that should have been obvious? I can remember watching my first rugby game as a young boy, and it was only about halfway through the game that I realized that the guys were actually attempting to get the ball across the line and not simply to move back and forth in a heap beating each other senseless.

That kind of thing still happens to me all the time in the Christian faith. I can remember reading a sermon by John Girardeau where he made a point, that should have been a no-brainer, but for me it was a revelation. The age of grace has an end. Yes, there is time here and now to take hold of the mercy offered extended to you by God in the gospel of His Son, but there is a day coming when the age of grace comes to an end, and the day of judgement comes. When that day comes and Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. Every knee will bow. Those who stubbornly refused to accept the

gospel will no longer be making excuses, for the grim truth of their situation will be all too apparent. *JC RYLE put it this way:*

"Thousands will wake up in another world and be convinced about truths which they refused to believe on earth. Earth is the only place in God's creation where there is any infidelity. Hell itself is nothing but the truth known too late."

That is what Jesus is warning of. The day that will come when it is no longer what Paul called *the acceptable time*, when it is the *day after the day of salvation*.

The full number of guests who answered the call to come to the wedding feast of the Lamb will be assembled with him within the doors, everyone will be wearing the spotless wedding garments he provided. And those who knock and ask for entry after that will be refused.

Jesus warns the men of his time, the Jews, don't think to say on that day. "Of course you know us, you taught in the streets of our village, remember how we were ate at Simon the Pharisees house with you? We were there."

But you didn't respond, you didn't repent and believe the gospel I preached that day in your village. You call yourselves children of Abraham. But if you had a heart like Abrahams you would have rejoiced to see my day and you would have believed what I am telling you.

Instead, you dawdled or you rejected the message outright. So now to those who were nearest the kingdom, first in the visible church, the Jews, will become last. And instead these who were far from the kingdom, the gentiles who come from north, and south, and east, and west. The four corners of the earth. The gospel will go out to them, and the tables will be turned. Now, O Israel, you who were first will be last. Weeping and wailing on that day will be to no avail. Today, now you should have wept for your sins, and believed in God's Son.

APPLICATIONS:

1) Application: Beware Externalism, do the needful work of self-examination. Keep in mind that Jesus delivered these warnings to members of the visible church of His time:

Catechism class example – kids think they were born with a good heart, naïve view of the wicked/righteous distinction, refusal to believe they could be in the wicked category

"Thirdly, it is most detrimental to neglect self-examination and the searching of one's heart. Such neglect holds man captive in the sleep of carelessness. It causes him to waste time. It renders the means of grace useless and impotent. It hardens his heart against all the threatenings and judgments of God. It holds him captive to the world and to sin; yes, it is the key whereby he closes heaven and opens hell for himself." Are you awake?

2) APPLICATION: Do not be dissuaded from entering in from the fewness of those who travel with you. Or that the vast majority of men are still walking the broad path that leads to destruction. Calvin put it well: ***"If you neglect (says he) to enter by the strait gate, because you are kept back by the great number of those who are going astray, do you not see that you are separated from the number of believers, and become involved with unbelievers?"*** *If the aspect of the world now dazzles your*

*eyes, the last day will cure you of this folly, but it will be too late: for you shall then know that you, and others like you, are excluded from **the kingdom of God**, and have no part with **Abraham**."*

3) *The gate may be narrow, but it is wide enough to admit the chief of sinners.* While there is no other way into the kingdom of God, but by the narrow door of Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, know that that door and leads to a kingdom vast in size. – *Willy Wonka door – tiny door leading to a vast room with many delightful things.* Do not let the narrowness of the gate prejudice you into thinking God's grace is limited or make you think that the rewards are small. His mercy is deeper than the depths of the sea and greater than the distance between the east and the west.

32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

Dawdle no longer.[get out of the road!] Don't be like the child given money and told to go to the store who dawdles till it is too late. Take up the key, use it. Enter in by the narrow gate, while it is still today it is still not too late. Don't dream about tomorrow – tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow I will repent you say – that is too late. NOW is the day, now is the hour. We don't do altar calls, or ask you sign a card, or raise your hand, but... Believe in the Lord Jesus today and you will be saved!