

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Narrow Door

Luke 13:22-30

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The Narrow Door

Scripture

Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem from Galilee. He only has a few months left to live. He knows that he is going to Jerusalem to pay the penalty for people's sin by his death. He will sacrifice his life in order to reconcile sinners with a holy God.

The theme of Jesus' preaching is the kingdom of God. He has been urging people to enter the kingdom of God. Someone wanted to know if only a few people would be saved. Jesus did not answer the question, but warned people about the danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God. He urged people to enter the kingdom of God through the narrow door.

Let's read about the narrow door in Luke 13:22-30:

²² He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³ And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, ²⁴ "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know 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 But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' ²⁸ In that place 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 but you yourselves cast out. ²⁹ And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." (Luke 13:22-30)

Introduction

In the summer of 1988 my wife, Eileen, and I flew from Los Angeles to Pittsburgh. It was Independence Day weekend and we anticipated an overcrowded airplane. Since we did not have to be back in Pittsburgh for another day, we decided that we would arrive at the airport at the last minute. We were hoping that the flight would be overbooked. The airline would find us another flight home and we would get vouchers.

When we arrived at the gate we were the last people in line. When we got to the desk, the airport attendant apologized and said that the flight was overbooked and we would not be able to fly on that plane that day.

We learned that there were about twenty-five passengers who were getting bumped off that flight. All of us had confirmed tickets. None of the bumped passengers were happy, except for Eileen and me. Everyone else was missing some important event. One person, I think, had a funeral to attend, and another a wedding. As you can imagine, there were many unhappy people in the airport that day.

Of course, Eileen and I wanted to be late so as to get bumped off that flight. However, none of the other passengers wanted to be excluded from that flight.

As bad as it was for those people to be excluded from the flight that day, it pales in comparison to being excluded from the kingdom of God. Jesus warned people of the danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God.

Lesson

The danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God as set forth in Luke 13:22-30 teaches us to be sure that we have entered the kingdom of God.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Question Asked of Jesus (13:22-23)
2. The Answer Given By Jesus (13:24-30)

I. **The Question Asked of Jesus (13:22-23)**

First, let's look at the question asked of Jesus.

Luke noted back in Luke 9:51 that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Here, toward the end of chapter 13 Jesus is still going to Jerusalem, and while he was traveling, **he went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem** (13:22). Jesus was going to Jerusalem to pay the penalty for people's sin by his death. He will sacrifice his life in order to reconcile sinners with a holy God.

The closer Jesus got to Jerusalem, the more urgently he spoke about eternal issues. He wanted to shake people out of their complacency and to pay attention to their own eternal destinies. He knew that the Father had sent him as the Christ to seek and to save the lost. He had announced the kingdom of God, and taught people about the kingdom of God. He taught that entrance into the kingdom of God was gained through faith and repentance. And he urged people to trust him and repent of their sins before they perished. While he was teaching **someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?"** (13:23).

This was a very important question. We don't know who asked the question. We don't know if the person was hostile or friendly toward Jesus. But that does not really matter. The question reflected a common understanding among people in Jesus' day. Commentator Philip Ryken noted, "The rabbis all agreed that some people would be saved, while others would be damned. They had different opinions about the relative numbers of the redeemed and the reprobate, yet there seemed to be a consensus that all Israelites would be saved, except for a few notorious sinners. According to one ancient writing,

‘All Israelites have a share in the world to come, for it is written: “Thy people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified.” And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead . . . and that the Law is not from Heaven’ (Sanhedrin 10.1).”¹

The question asked by someone reflected the view that only a few people in the entire world would be saved. Those few were Israelites, except for some notoriously wicked sinners. Essentially they believed that all Jews would be saved and all Gentiles would perish. Jews would be saved through heredity. They would be saved because of their nationality and by following the rules set by their religious leaders. So, there was a tremendous amount of complacency among people in Jesus’ day. If you were born a Jew, and you did not become a notorious sinner, you were one of the few who would be saved.

We need to be careful to recognize the context of the question. The person asked Jesus about salvation in his day. Nevertheless, we can apply the principle of the question to ourselves in our day too. There is a tremendous amount of complacency among people in our day too. People think that they will be saved because they are born in a “Christian country” or a “Christian home,” or because they attend a “Christian church” and follow the rules set by their religious leaders.

This thinking is almost always reflected when people die. When a person dies, especially if it is a sad story that is reported in the national news, the common understanding is that the person who died has gone to heaven. The only people who don’t go to heaven are notoriously wicked sinners and, of

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 40–41.

course, people from other religions.

So, this is a very important question. And we do well to pay close attention to the answer given by Jesus.

II. The Answer Given By Jesus (13:24-30)

And second, let's examine the answer given by Jesus.

The person who asked the question, along with all the other people, assumed that Jesus would affirm that only a few people would be saved. However, Jesus did not affirm that at all. In fact, Jesus did not answer the question directly.

Jesus did not want people speculating about the number of people who would be saved. Jesus was far more interested in a personal response to the question. In other words, Jesus took the theoretical question and personalized it. The question, "Will the saved be few?" became, "Will the saved be you?"²

That is the thrust of Jesus' answer. Jesus consistently pressed people to make a personal response to the gospel invitation. He wanted people to take a close look at their own standing before God. He commanded, "Do not ask about the number of the elect. Make sure that *you* are saved!"

So, with that in mind, let us look at how people are to enter the kingdom of God.

A. *The Kingdom of God Is Entered by Effort (13:24)*

First, Jesus said that the kingdom of God is entered by effort.

Jesus **said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (13:24).**

The only way to make sure that you are saved is by press-

² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, ed. Terry Muck, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 381.

ing through the narrow entrance to the kingdom. And you must do whatever it takes to enter through the narrow door.

The Greek word for **strive** (*agonizesthe*) is a word for intense exertion. It means to “struggle, fight, labor fervently.”³ Interestingly, the English word for “agonize” comes from the Greek word. Jesus’ point is that you must struggle, fight, and labor fervently to enter the narrow door that leads to salvation.

Now someone may say that I am teaching that we are saved by our own works. But that is not what I am saying. The Bible is very clear that we are saved by the grace of God and not by our own works. Nevertheless, Jesus said that we must **strive to enter through the narrow door**. Paul himself said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Bradley Nassif summarized it well when he said, “Grace is opposed to merit, but it is not opposed to effort.”⁴

R. B. Kuiper put it this way, “Whatever contribution men make to their salvation they make by the grace of God. And that makes salvation the work of grace a hundred percent.”⁵

Or, as Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “Everything is of grace in the Christian life from the very beginning to the very end.”⁶ And also, “Were it not for the grace of God there would be no such thing as a Christian.”⁷

So Jesus said that we must **strive to enter through the narrow door**, if we are to be saved. Sadly, **many will seek to enter and will not be able**. Everyone wants to go to heaven –

³ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 8.

⁴ See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/may/3052608.html>.

⁵ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006), 266.

⁶ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 266.

⁷ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 266.

but on his or her own terms. They want the blessing of eternal life in heaven, but they will not **strive to enter through the narrow door**. Jesus did not say why many would not be able to enter through the narrow door. Presumably, the same reasons for not entering through the narrow door are as Jesus gave in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:5-14. Douglas J.W. Milne put it well when he said, “Salvation is not for the half-hearted but for the single-minded.”⁸

Philip Ryken put it this way:

Today there are more than one thousand organized religions in America, each with its own system of belief, doctrine of God, explanation of reality, view of humanity, and sense of destiny. Imagine for a moment that each of these different religions has its own doorway, and imagine standing in a hallway that is lined with these doorways as far as the eye can see. Door after door, religion after religion—which one will you choose to enter?

Some people say it does not matter which doorway you enter because they all lead to the same place. There is no need to worry about your choice of religion because they all teach the same thing anyway. Open any door you like and you will still get to heaven. This is the way many people think about religion – maybe most people. They see it as a personal preference that makes no ultimate difference.

But is that really true? Is it truly the case that all doors lead to heaven? What if the other doors do not lead anywhere at all, or even worse, if they lead straight to hell? What if there is only one doorway that leads to salvation, one portal to the glory of God? What if it happens to be such a small door that many people miss it? What if that door will not stay open forever, but will soon close firmly shut, leaving people outside in eternal darkness?

In that case, you would want to know for sure which door was the right door. As you stood in the hallway, looking

⁸ Douglas J. W. Milne, *Let's Study Luke*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, Let's Study (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 222.

down the corridor of all the religions, you would want to be sure not to make a mistake. You would give anything in the world to know which door was the only door that would lead you to God.⁹

There is only one door. It is a narrow door. And it is only entered by effort. That is, you must seek the kingdom of God. You must read the Word of God. You must ask God to give you faith to believe. You must ask God to enable you to repent. You must keep listening to the gospel. You must ask God to work in your life to ensure that you enter through the narrow door.

So, first the kingdom of God is entered by effort.

B. The Kingdom of God Is Entered Through a Relationship (13:25-28)

Second, Jesus said that the kingdom of God is entered through a relationship.

Jesus pictured a group of people traveling arriving late at night at a roadside inn, only to find the doors closed and the owner in bed for the night. The travelers banged on the door and shouted to the owner that they knew him. To their astonishment the owner replied that he did not know them and told them to leave because they are evildoers. Listen to Jesus in Luke 13:25-27:

²⁵When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, "Lord, open to us," then he will answer you, "I do not know where you come from." ²⁶Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." ²⁷But he will say, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!"

⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 39–40.

There is nothing subtle in Jesus' story. He directly addresses the delusion and self-deceit of his generation. The people in Jesus' day thought that they were among the elect. However, if they found themselves on the wrong side on the Day of Judgment, they thought that they could appeal to the fact that they knew Jesus. In fact, some of them had even eaten with him and they had listened to his preaching and teaching. Surely, this association with Jesus had to count for something?

On the contrary, according to Jesus, their delusion into thinking that they were among the elect when in fact they were not made them **workers of evil**. They would receive no mercy from God, but would be cast into hell forever. Jesus said, **"In that place 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 but you yourselves cast out"** (Luke 13:28).

Jesus' words teach us that the kingdom of God is not entered merely by association with Jesus. No, it is entered through a personal relationship with Jesus. That is to say, you must not merely have an acquaintance with Jesus, you must know him personally.

Many people today know about Jesus. But they do not know him personally. They know about his birth, life, death, and resurrection. But they do not know him personally and savingly. Jesus' own brother wrote about an intellectual belief that does not save a person when he wrote, "Even the demons believe – and shudder!" (James 2:19).

What about you? Do you know Jesus personally? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? You enter into a personal relationship with Jesus when you surrender your life to him as your Lord and Savior.

So, first the kingdom of God is entered by effort. Second, the kingdom of God is entered through a relationship.

C. *The Kingdom of God Is Entered with a Multitude (13:29-30)*

And third, Jesus said that the kingdom of God is entered with a multitude.

Contrary to the common view of Jesus' day, the saved will not be a few. There will not only be Jews in heaven, but there will also be people from all the nations. Jesus said, "**And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last**" (13:29-30).

That is so encouraging. People from all nations will be represented at the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven.

So, first the kingdom of God is entered by effort. Second, the kingdom of God is entered through a relationship. And third, the kingdom of God is entered with a multitude.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God as set forth in Luke 13:22-30, we should be sure that we have entered the kingdom of God.

Darrell Bock said, "God does not save us through our activity, through heredity, or by proxy."¹⁰ God does not save people who merely want to be saved, attend church, and participate in church ministry. No. God saves sinners who cry out to him for mercy. God saves people who have entered into a personal relationship with him through faith and repentance.

Have you entered the kingdom of God? Are you saved?

Put your trust in Jesus alone for the gift of eternal life and turn from your sins. Do this, and you will be saved. Amen.

¹⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, 381.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Jesus, you warned people in your day about being excluded from the kingdom of God. You urged people not to speculate theoretically about the number of the elect but to respond personally to you and your message.

Jesus, you similarly warn people in our day about being excluded from the kingdom of God. You urge people to repent of their sin and to believe in you.

Jesus, if there is anyone who has not yet repented of sin and turned to you in faith, will you please grant that person repentance and faith today?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!