

Enter through the narrow door

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
at Poplar Baptist Church, on 8th January 2017

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

Luke 13.24

Introduction

In these words Jesus makes a solemn and urgent call to his hearers to enter the Kingdom of God while they have the opportunity to do so. It speaks to us as well. At the moment the door to heaven is open. Anybody who wishes to do so can enter this door. But it will not remain open for ever. We need to come to Jesus quickly, while we can, and receive from him the eternal life, before it is too late.

The context is that someone has asked Jesus a question, as recorded in verse 23, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" We do not know who asked this question or why he asked it. It may be that he asked it because he sought to find fault with Jesus, implying that if not many would be saved then Jesus would be a failure.

The person asked this as a general question, but Jesus turned this around and made the question an opportunity to issue a direct call to this individual, and to all who were listening, to make sure that they enter the Kingdom of God. So Jesus said to the man, as recorded in verse 24, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

There are a number of things we should note from this call:

1. There is a door into the Kingdom of heaven

There is a way to God. God is not unknowable. We can have a relationship with him. Even though God is God, and we are dust. Even though God is holy, and we are sinful. A way to God has been provided. The knowledge of God is not beyond our reach.

Many people have in their minds an idea that is some great and mysterious being who is beyond any knowledge by human beings. The tremendous thing is that, yes, God is indeed far beyond us in terms of his power and his holiness, but he has provided a way for us to know him personally through Jesus Christ.

2. It is a narrow door

The second thing to see is that it is a narrow door. Jesus says, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door."

This ties up with a similar passage in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 7 verses 13 and 14, where it is recorded that Jesus said, "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."

The way to destruction in hell is very broad. There are many different paths that lead there. You can go there as a Moslem, or as a Hindu, or as a Roman Catholic, or as a Mormon, or an atheist, or an agnostic, or a Jehovah's Witness, or as a so-called "liberal" Christian. You can go there as a very immoral and evil person, and you can go there as a very "upright" and "moral" person, in human terms. And it is very easy to be on the road to destruction. You do not need to make a conscious decision to be on it. From our earliest days we are on this road.

But the door that leads to the knowledge of God, and to eternal life, is very narrow. It is as narrow as Jesus Christ. It is only those who believe the Jesus is God's eternal Son, and who realise that they are sinners who cannot save themselves, and who trust in Jesus for salvation, who will go through it.

3. At the moment the door is open

Jesus says, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door". At the time when Jesus spoke the door was open. People could freely enter.

The door is still open. It is wide open. Anyone who wishes to may enter. You do not have to belong to a particular national or racial group. You do not need to have attained a certain moral standard. You do not need to have a certain level of education. You do not need to have arrived at a certain knowledge of the Bible. Whoever you, whatever you may have done in the past, you can come through this door.

The knowledge of God is totally free. There is nothing to pay. Just have to leave sin behind and put all trust in Christ

4. To go through the door requires great determination

Jesus says, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door."

The word that is translated "Make every effort" is the word from which we get our English word "agony". What is agony? It is very great pain. We must be prepared to suffer very great pain to enter through the narrow door.

This might seem to be a contradiction with what I have just said. I have just said that the way into the Kingdom of heaven is wide open. We do not have to pay anything, because Jesus has paid the price for us. So how can going through the door involve "effort" or "agony"? Do we have to pay for our salvation after all?

No. Salvation is entirely free. It is not earned or deserved in any way. It is free. The difficulty of entering the Kingdom of God is not due to any barriers that God has put up. The difficulty comes from barriers that our own tendency to sin, and the world, and the devil put in our way.

There are three big enemies that stand in way of our receiving salvation: the flesh, the world and the devil.

The flesh is the tendency to sin that we all have in us, which we were born with. When we start to get interested in Christ, our flesh will scream out, saying, "No. I still want to sin. Do not believe in Jesus, because then I will not be able to sin any more."

The world is this world as it is in opposition to God. If you move towards coming to Christ, your non-Christian friends and neighbours, and family members, may well laugh at you or even threaten you with physical harm. It can be very hard for a person to press on into the Kingdom of God in the face of the threat of persecution. But we must do so if we are to be saved.

The third enemy is the devil himself. Some people as they come to Christ and start to serve him experience direct demonic attack in one form or another. These attacks are designed to put off the potential believer from serving Christ. We must be absolutely determined to press right on into the Kingdom of God.

5. If we do not enter while we can, we will find that we are too late

Jesus says, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

The opportunity to enter through the door is limited. We can only enter while we are still alive, and before Jesus comes again. The day is going to come when the door is shut. Then, any who have not already entered will not be able to enter.

Jesus said in the next verse, "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.'"

Jesus now uses a sort of parable, and speaks about the "owner of the house" getting up and shutting the door. This is an illustration of how the opportunity for salvation will come to an end. Just as, in the evening, the owner a house locks up for the night, so at the end of the world, Jesus will, as it were, lock up the Kingdom of heaven. The door which had been wide open will be closed fast.

This is why it is urgent that we come to Christ for salvation quickly, while there is still time. None of us knows when we will die. Here we are at the beginning of a new year. We do not know if Jesus might have come back by this time next year. And even if Jesus does not come back, we do not know which of us will still be alive this time next year. We might all be gone. Even by next week some may have died. So it is vitally important that we come to him while we can.

6. Many will be genuinely surprised to be shut out

The next thing to see is that many will be genuinely surprised to be shut out of the Kingdom of heaven. We read in verses 25 to 27,

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.' "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

Jesus says to his hearers that they will be surprised not to be allowed into the Kingdom of heaven. They will say, "We ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets".

The people that Jesus was talking with thought that because they had eaten with Jesus and he had taught in their streets that they would be OK. But Jesus says that he will say to them, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!"

The key thing is, do you know Jesus. Not, do you believe in him. Not, do you honour him as a prophet. Not, do you try to obey the Bible. Not, are you religious. But do you know Jesus personally? If do not know Jesus, will be excluded from heaven.

Could it be that some will say, on that day, "Lord, Lord, I used to attend Poplar Baptist Church. The pastor visited me in my home, and I have been to his house for dinner. I used to learn memory verses as a child." Could it be that some will say, "Lord, Lord, My parents were Christians. We used to have family prayers together." Could it be that Jesus will say to some of us here, on that final day, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!" ?

Notice what he calls them: "You evildoers". The person who does not know Jesus will be classed as an "evildoer" however "good" they may have been. You might be a very upright person in human terms. You might give your money to the poor. You might go on pilgrimages. You might pray regularly. But if you do not truly know Jesus you are, in his sight, an "evil doer"

You may be very religious. You may be very "good" in human terms. But if you have not come to know Jesus as your Saviour, you are an "evildoer".

7. The final end for those who do not enter the Kingdom of God will be terrible

Jesus says in verse 28, "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."

He says that there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" on that final day, for those who are shut out from the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says to the people that the Old Testament prophets will be there, but you will be thrown out. Will that be true for you? Will your Christian friends will be there, and your Christian family, but you thrown out? I pray to God that it will no be so.

The question that each one of us must ask ourselves is this: am I in, or am I out. Do not assume that just because you have a Christian family, or because you go to church, or because you know the Bible, that this means that you are in. You have got to have gone through that door. You must have come to God through Jesus Christ and put your trust in Christ for salvation. Have you done so? I urge you to do so tonight, before you do anything else.

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