

The Narrow Door

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[0 : 0 0] will those who are saved be few? Will those who are saved be few? There are eight billion human beings on earth today. Will only a few of them be saved? How many constitutes a few?

The population of Glasgow is 635,000. When we get to heaven, shall only a few of those there be from our dear green place? Lord, will those who are saved be few?

It is always the wrong question to ask, Lord, will those who are saved be few? Because it distracts us from asking the right questions, which are, will I be saved?

And how can I be saved? It also distracts us from the great task our Lord sets us to go out into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. Because the person who's fixated with the question of how few will be saved will never get round to the doing of anything, especially the evangelism of the unsaved. Lord, will those who are saved be few? Is not the right question. Lord, will I be saved?

Is. Well, in these verses in Luke chapter 13, 22 through 30, headlined by that question, Jesus isn't interested in giving an answer. Rather, He turns it around and says, will you be saved?

[1 : 3 8] This passage is one of the most challenging we've come across yet in our studies in Luke's gospel. And it's imperative that we answer these questions today because we don't know what tomorrow holds.

And the cost of remaining outside the kingdom of God is too terrifying for any of us here today to contemplate. I want us briefly to consider three things from this passage.

Kingdom inclusion from verse 22 through 24. Kingdom exclusion from verse 25 through 28. And kingdom extension from verse 29 through 30.

There may be few or there may be many from Glasgow in the kingdom of God. It's not for us to know. But right here and right now, let's make sure that we're there.

First of all then, from verse 22 through 24, kingdom inclusion. Kingdom inclusion. The Jewish people of Jesus' day thought that by virtue of their ethnicity as Jews and their obedience to the laws of the rabbis, that they were assured salvation, that they were automatically saved by their Jewishness. But Jesus isn't interested here in their ethnicity. Those born in a Christian country and brought up in a Christian home are not automatically included in the kingdom of God.

Their bloodline has nothing to do with it any more than the ethnicity and the tradition of the Jews of Jesus' day had anything to do with their being saved. Rather, Jesus says, strive to enter through the narrow door. Strive to enter through the narrow door. The Greek word strive is *agonizo*, that from which we get our English word *agonize*. You know, close-up photographs of a hundred-meter sprinter will show their muscles rippling and their faces straining toward the winning tape. Or the weightlifter as he's gripping the bar. As he lifts, every muscle in his body is concentrated on the task at hand. Neither the athlete or the weightlifter has time to think about anything else. The hundred-meter sprinter isn't worrying about where he left his car keys when he's 50 meters into his race. The weightlifter isn't thinking about whether he brushed his hair when he has his bar on his shoulders. In the same way Jesus is telling us, if we want to be saved, we need to have our whole mind, heart, and will trained toward that objective. Agonize. Forget your house. Forget your car. What must come first is your salvation.

[4 : 31] Forget your status. Forget your pleasures. Forget your money. Forget your relationships. What must come first is whether you are saved? That's what it means in context to strive. Be wholehearted in your pursuit of God. Jeremiah 29 verse 13, God says to us, you will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with your whole heart. The next word is enter. Enter. By definition, to enter means that prior to entering, you are not in, you are out. One enters from out to in. The Jewish leaders thought that by virtue of their Jewishness, they were automatically in. Many people who call themselves Christian today think the same way, that by virtue of them being born in a Christian country to Christian parents and having been baptized as infants in the church, they are already in. By using this phrase, strive to enter, Jesus is telling us there is no automatic inclusion in the kingdom of God. On account of our sinful natures, every human being is on the outside. Every human being is on the outside and must strive to enter. Do we not realize today that unless we have consciously trusted in Jesus Christ, no matter our heritage or ethnicity, we are still on the outside.

Then Jesus, He speaks of entering through the narrow door. The narrow door. Again, by using this word narrow, Jesus isn't commenting on whether a few or many will be saved. Rather, He's talking about how we enter into salvation. If you go to a football game, the turnstiles will only let one person through at a time. That's the idea here. The door is so narrow, only one person at a time can enter. It's too narrow for a whole nation to pass through. It's as each individual passes through the gate that they are saved. So, this narrow door is the language of one at a time, that the kingdom of God grows one by one.

Each person must consciously trust in Jesus for themselves. You can't go through there with someone else. You've got to go through it for yourself. Murrayfield, the largest stadium in Scotland, fills up one at a time. The kingdom of God fills as one by one individual people choose to follow Christ and become His disciples. So, kingdom inclusion involves striving to move from the outside of the kingdom to the inside by consciously choosing for yourself to trust in Jesus Christ.

Now, Jesus isn't saying everything here that could be said about Christian salvation. He's not talking about justification by faith, but He's saying everything He needs to in this context. Kingdom inclusion is not automatic. No one has assured salvation by virtue of their ethnicity or their heritage nor their obedience to a set of man-made regulations we call religion. Today, you must choose for yourself every single one here. Stay on the outside of the kingdom or strive to enter into the kingdom through the narrow door by faith in Jesus Christ. Kingdom inclusion.

Second, kingdom exclusion from verse 25 through 28. Exclusion. These verses present some of the most challenging pictures in the whole Bible. Jesus is speaking here to the Jewish leadership with the wrong-headed view that to be an observant Jew grants a person automatic membership of the kingdom of God. Many call the gospel of Luke the Gentile gospel. The more you study it, you see it deeply embedded in Jewish culture, religion, and ideas. The greater depotence of the early church to which Luke and Acts were written weren't the Romans, but the Jews in their synagogues. And in these verses, Jesus is calling His listeners to look ahead to the day of judgment.

[9 : 25] Here pictured as the master of the house having risen and shutting the door to the kingdom of God. The master of the house here is God, and a day shall come when the door to salvation shall be forever closed. There shall be no more possibility of anyone from outside entering in. They will remain forever on the outside. Before I was a minister, I very clearly remember on one occasion in my work as an engineer being late for a plane from Paris to Gatwick, where we lived. I got to the desk in Charles de Gaulle only to be told, just being closed. I remember that feeling of panic, and I realized I had missed getting home to Kathmur and Samuel, the baby Samuel, by 30 seconds. Thankfully, there was another plane a couple of hours later I picked up. Maybe you know how it feels to miss a flight or a plane or a bus and think, oh darn it. When it comes to the day of judgment, there won't be a later door open, and the feeling of missing out will be infinitely greater than the one I had. Oh, I pleaded with the people at the flight desk to let me through, but they wouldn't. And in the same way, in our passage, those on the outside will stand, and they'll knock at the door saying, Lord, open to us, open to us. They're knocking, and their voices will become more vigorous until finally the master of the house, God, will say, I don't know where you came from.

Then they'll argue as we see and say, well, we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets. This argument clearly comes from the mouths of the religious leaders who often invited Jesus to into their houses to dine with Him in order to trip Him up in something He said. Those Jewish leaders in whose streets Jesus taught, they argue that their association with Jesus should be enough to grant them entrance into the kingdom of God. How many people brought up in our country today, brought up in Christian families, having baptized in a Christian church as infants, think the same way?

That their ethnic identity, their upbringing, and a few drops of water poured on their head assures them a place in the kingdom of God. Or even worse, coming to church every week of our lives, associating with other Christians, hearing the Word of God preached assures our place in the kingdom of God. The master of the house will have none of it. He says, I tell you, I don't know where you came from.

Depart from me, all you workers of evil. Workers of evil, these Jewish religious teachers. For all their religious exactness and their obedience to the laws of the rabbis, for all their supposed devotion to God, they're evil. In the previous chapters, we've witnessed increasing tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. He's pronounced woes upon them. He's called them hypocrites, and he's accused them in the previous passage of putting their religious devotion before God's call to love their neighbor. Workers of evil indeed, he says. If you want to find the world's biggest workers of evil today, don't go looking in drug dens. Look in churches. Look in mosques. Look in temples.

But it's in these places, evil men, masquerading in holy colors, destroy the precious souls of the vulnerable. These workers of evil preach a Christless, crossless message of religious observance and good works, earning us eternal life, rather than faith alone in Christ alone. They spit on Christ and on His cross.

[13 : 30] And God's judgment is chilling. Depart from me, He said. Depart from me. It is a permanent departure from the love, the mercy, and the compassion of God. Depart from me. The door is now shut. The judgment is final. The God to whom the Jewish leaders had sworn loyalty, but whose Son and Messiah they are rejecting now pronounces His verdict. What chilling words to hear in the day of judgment from the mouth of God Himself? Depart from me, evil workers. Be they few or many, be they rich or poor, be they Jewish or Gentile, be they religious or not. All who reject Jesus will hear these words, cry out in panic and loss.

There is no purgatory where one may pay off one's debts to God. His judgment will be sudden and final, and there shall be no appeals. They have rejected the Son of God, and then God will reject them.

Don't we fear hearing those words any more, more than any other word we could possibly hear, that we will forever perish from God apart from any love, compassion, tenderness, community.

Worse still, that place to which they depart in verse 28 is described, in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's a picture of torture. Weeping is the expression of grief, and the gnashing of teeth is the expression of rage. All the tears of this life will pale into insignificance beside this intense grief of hell. Never has there been weeping like they'll be there. And the screaming rage, the rage of the place will know no limits. It is X-rated, enough to drive the strongest mind mad.

Remember, Jesus is speaking primarily here to the Jewish leadership, and He's telling them that their grief and anger will result from them seeing Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the Jewish prophets in the kingdom of God, but they themselves cast out. Some years ago, I had a nightmare.

[15 : 53] I haven't forgotten it, and it still makes me shiver when I remember it. In my nightmare, the people of my home village in the north were standing in a great crowd in the car park on Fountain Road.

Alec knows that. I could see there my family in the front row, and my friends, and those I went to school with, and even the Christians in the church there. And they were holding up their hands against me and shouting, you're not one of us. You don't belong here anymore. Go away. And I asked them, what have I done wrong? Or, what have I done wrong? As He would say in Gospo, to which they shouted, you're not one of us. You do not belong here. Go away.

For all that the Jewish religious leaders were of the blood, on that fateful day described by Jesus, they'll learn they don't belong to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets, because they refused to believe in the Messiah promised to their forebears. From that place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, they'll cry out in rage, what have we done wrong? To which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will reply, you failed to believe in the seed God promised us, Jesus Christ. In their grief and their rage, daily increasing, the religious leaders will forever experience the close of the Lord. In their hearts, they'll turn to the prophets, they'll turn to the prophets, they'll turn to the prophets, Jeremiah and Isaiah and Samuel, and they'll say, what have we done wrong?

To which the prophets shall reply, you twisted the message we preached to you to your own benefit, and you rejected God's greatest prophet, Jesus Christ. With heads held low in grief, and their grief and rage daily increasing, the religious leaders will forever experience the closed doors and pain of eternal destruction, together with the voices of their forebears crying out in their heads, you are not one of us, you do not belong here, go away.

Let that not be the fate of any of us here today. Let that not be true of us, that when that door is shut on the day of salvation, that our parents and our friends and our loved ones should be on the inside, but we on account of our spiritual apathy and unwillingness, by our unwillingness to strive to enter by faith in Jesus Christ through the narrow door, should forever be trapped on the outside.

[18 : 39] With that fateful day in the front of our minds, none of us should ask the question, Lord, will those who are saved be few? Rather, we must ask the question, Lord, will I be saved? Will I be saved? Well, then finally, from verse 29 and 30, kingdom extension, kingdom extension.

In the Israel of Jesus' day, there was a very sharp division between Jews and non-Jews, also called Gentiles. Religious Jews thought of Gentiles as enemies of God, unclean subhuman.

Gentiles were cannon fodder for the day of judgment. Gentiles were so unclean that it was considered sinful for a righteous Jew to associate with them, to enter into one of their houses and to eat with a Gentile was tantamount to the unforgivable sin.

In the minds of these Jewish leaders, the Gentiles were a virus who, when the Messiah came, he would exterminate. If ever a people were on the outside of the kingdom of God, it was these ungodly, unclean, uncivilized Gentiles.

[19 : 52] Can you then imagine the shock of the Jewish religious leaders when Jesus said, people will come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south and recline at the table in the kingdom of God?

Because without doubt, Jesus here is referring to the Gentiles. The Jewish religious leaders have en masse rejected Jesus as Messiah and Lord. They'll arrest Him, torture Him, crucify Him.

But in days and months to come, Gentiles, non-Jews, hearing the good news of Jesus Christ dying as a sacrifice for sin, believe and embrace Him as their Lord and Savior.

They, these Gentile believers, shall take their places in the kingdom of God, along with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the Old Testament prophets, while the Jewish religious leadership shall be cast into utter darkness.

That's why Jesus says in verse 30, some are last who will be first, and some who are first who will be last. In the minds of the Pharisees, the Gentiles were always last in God's priorities and held the least chance of ever getting into God's kingdom.

[21 : 06] But Jesus says they'll be the first. In the minds of the Pharisees, they were the first in God's priorities by virtue of their Jewishness and obedience to the laws of the rabbis.

But Jesus says, you'll be the last. How these words of Jesus must have shocked the Jewish religious leaders. How His words must have angered them and fascinated them at the same time because they knew He was right, but they told themselves He was wrong.

Not many years after this, a zealous young Pharisee called Saul of Tarsus hated the idea of a crucified Jewish Messiah.

And he did everything he could to destroy the early church. But then on the road to Damascus, the risen Lord Jesus met with him in His glory, and Saul of Tarsus became a new man.

He realized that he had been wrong his whole life through. He became Paul the apostle and was known as the apostle to the Gentiles. It was Paul who first became a missionary to the lands of the Gentiles and was the first to found churches in Europe.

[22 : 18] It was Paul's arguments which led to the acceptance of Gentiles on equal footing with Jews in the Christian church. And it was Paul who was Luke's mentor in the writing of this gospel and the book of Acts.

Through Paul's life, he saw tens of thousands of Gentiles from east and west, from north and south, striving to enter through the narrow door by faith in Jesus.

Although he loved his fellow Jews, he would later say of his past life, trying to earn God's favor by zealously following the laws of the rabbis, he would say, I count everything as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Today, in our world, Gentiles are flooding into the church in ever-increasing numbers. I said to a couple of folk at the door this little story, Alison Becker is the Brazilian goalkeeper for Liverpool Football Club.

But what's more important for Alison Becker is that he's a Christian. It has been said that Alison Becker baptized more people last year than he let goals in for Liverpool.

[23 : 34] Now, he's one of the best goalkeepers in the world. But he's also a prolific evangelist whose witness has led many, many people to Christ.

I'm not a betting man, and I hope none of you are either. But if I was, I would bet my house that Alison Becker never asks the question, will only a few be saved?

And if he ever did, he'd probably answer it by saying, not have I got anything to do with it. You see, this passage doesn't end in a low note of doom, but on the highest possible note of glory.

Given that people will come from east and west and north and south into the kingdom of God, not a few will be saved, but many.

Yes, they'll enter in by the narrow door, which means that they'll believe one at a time, but they're going to fill a heavenly city, not just a stadium. We're told in the book of Revelation that the city of God is filled with a great multitude, no one can number, taken from all the peoples of the world.

[24 : 47] But as we close, let's take it back to where we are today. Last Monday, myself and Kathmer, she had the day off, English Bank holiday and all that.

We went for a walk through the west end of Glasgow, and we took a walk through the cloisters at Glasgow University. It was graduation day, and many graduating students were walking about in their robes.

Just because Kathmer and myself and the dog were in the cloisters on the same day doesn't mean that the dog was getting a master's degree awarded. No amount of association with these students is enough.

Just to be in the same place as other Christians who have faith in Jesus today and are therefore in the kingdom of God is not enough for any of us.

We too must believe for ourselves. The question is never, Lord, will only a few be saved? The question is always, Lord, will I be saved?

[25 : 53] There's only one way to be sure that you will be, and that is today to do what Kate did last year, to take the step of putting your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, of turning your back on all you know to be wrong and committing your life to Jesus.

And then you can look forward to that last day, knowing that your future is secure with King Jesus. So will you come before you miss that flight?

Will you come now?