

Salvation of Few

By

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Text: Luke 13:22-30

A Narrow Opening into a Glorious Kingdom

The kingdom project Christ inaugurated on earth has an ultimate goal – to make kingdom members actual kings and priests in the actual world-ruling Kingdom of God:

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:27).

The ‘*Olam Haba*’, the kingdom to come, is without precedent in power and glory and excellence. It’s Paradise regained but having much more grandeur and excitement with all the misrule, pain and death behind it – allowed nowhere near it!

It’s a glorious epoch which rejoices the heart of every true believer. But the point of entry into the kingdom is rather interesting. It’s open but not too widely opened. It’s a narrow gate – and the narrowness of it might deter you from entering!

This was the Lord’s own answer to a question from a disciple as to whether few people will be saved.

This was at a time Christ was busy about His gospel salvation work, teaching in the towns and villages as He journeyed toward Jerusalem:

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

“Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved?” (Luke 13:22-23).

I am intrigued by the wording of the question. Why didn’t the person ask, ‘are there many that be saved?’

The questioner seemed to be speaking with a presupposition of low expectation. Either many people were not responding and coming to faith as enthusiastically as he expected. Or maybe, he might have seen people hobnob with Christ for a while only for them to turn back to the world.

Something he might have observed didn’t give him the impression that great number of people would be saved.

Struggle to Enter the Narrow Gate

In answering the question asked, Christ was less concerned about others' fate than the questioner and his fellow disciples' own chances vis-à-vis salvation.

We need to ponder this same issue as individuals seeking salvation. Are we obsessively concerned about whether or not someone is saved or being saved rather than thinking about our own salvation?

Although we are to be concerned about others' salvation and work to reach them with the saving truth of Jesus, we are not to take our own salvation for granted. We are not to assume that now that we have found the truth our salvation is secure, and so there's no further need to pay attention to it.

Truth be told, that is an erroneous view of how we ought to conduct ourselves in the Messiah. Indeed, as believers in the Messiah, we are to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Php. 2:12). There must be commitment and constant vigilance to keep to the narrow way of life.

And that's not an easy feat. The Master uses the word "strive". It takes a struggle to enter and stay in:

*"And He said unto them,
"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24).*

The operative word is 'strive'. Otherwise, the ill-fate of the "many" who vainly try to enter will befall us! The Kingdom of God interests many people. After all, who doesn't want to enjoy eternal life in heaven in peace and abundant blessings?

However, the entrance is too narrow for their comfort and liking. And that is deterrent enough to scare them off or make them give up! The kingdom of heaven promise a glorious future, but the entrance into it is restrictive; the entry requirements are too stringent! It's a narrow doorway of self-denial, humility, sacrifice and obedience. It demands that you give up your fallen Adamic nature to which you are accustomed in favour of Christ's holy nature of righteousness, "for", says He, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).

The obligation of righteousness can never be heavier than the burden of sin and of Satan, the evil slave master. But people respond, 'we feel at home pursuing our own hearts' desires of the flesh. Christ's way is foreign to our nature', and so many fail to enter by the narrow gate.

In but Outside

For the most part, those who fail to enter by the narrow gate simply baulk at the narrowness of the entrance and turn away. For some of these same people, however, things are not so simple.

To them, they have entered, but, in reality, they are outside the gate! They live in the self-delusion that they have entered. And that's what I find most poignant but not too surprising.

They consider themselves, in their own imagination, to have gained entry into the kingdom, but the Master of the house sees them outside it. Perception turned out to be a hallucination! However, this sad reality will only dawn on them when the Master rises to shut the door tight! That's when they will realize that they had been standing outside the kingdom walls all along! But it will be too late to do anything about it.

The narrow doorway of salvation will not remain open forever:

“When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are:

“Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets.

“But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:25-27).

It will be dreadful day when the door is slammed in your face – especially one who all along assumed he/she was a child of the Kingdom. So then, membership of the Kingdom has two phases: the believer who is presently in the Kingdom, having entered by the narrow gate, will be in the Kingdom (proper) as a co-ruler with Christ.

Even so, those who cry loudest asking to be let in when the door is slammed shut are not unacquainted with the Kingdom. They are familiar faces around Kingdom activity and even take part in it – but they are not really part of the Kingdom. They have not entered in yet! They lived in the presence of the Lord as nominal members of His church and enjoyed the benefits and goodies of His Spiritual gifts but, because they did not enter by the narrow gate but continued to indulge their lives of lawlessness, they remained outside the Kingdom and they were shut out! They had no character change. Neither did they submit to the Lordship of Christ. While they ate and drank in His presence – enjoying the message of His truth and healing touch and deliverance power – they denied Him their hearts. And it showed in their behavior of lawlessness, disqualifying them from the Kingdom.

So don't mistake your hearing of the Word of truth as well as your experience of God's deliverance power for evidence of salvation.

The real evidence is the fruit of righteousness which stems from faith in Christ Jesus. The opposite of this righteousness is “iniquity” or lawlessness which disqualifies one from the Kingdom of God:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

“Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11; see also Gal. 5:19-21).

In the above-quoted scripture, it's clear that those who are washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God are presumed to be not unrighteous (like fornicators or thieves or homosexuals) and therefore qualified to inherit the Kingdom of God. The Lord will not wash you in His precious holy blood, sanctify you by His Word, justify you in His name and by His Spirit, and leave you a doer of unrighteousness. He will leave you a new person, a changed man or woman who has been justified, sanctified and washed from all unrighteousness. The 'narrow gate' has filtered out all deeds and inclinations of lawlessness prompted by the lusts of the flesh.

Otherwise, the Lord will answer you from the inside, “depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity”. Only those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of God (Matt. 7:21).

The doing of the Father's will, then, is the “narrow gate”, the entry point into the Kingdom. This holy will of the Father is averse to lawlessness and therefore expressed through the keeping of His holy, righteous commandments. (See 1 John 2:3-4 & Eccl. 12:13-14).

Don't Dilly-dally to Regret Later

Today, you might not see the importance of entering by the narrow gate by giving it all up for Christ; you might be content to hang around the peripheries of the kingdom, enjoying the crumbs of divine healing and deliverance which occasionally come your way.

But a day is coming when you will weep as you have never wept before – when you see the full glorious promise of the kingdom actually fulfilled in the lives of God's saints without you!

“There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Luke 13:28).

“Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets” of God have their place guaranteed in the Kingdom, says the Lord of the realm. But you yourself will be thrust out because you refused to enter by the narrow gate.

Your failure to enter by the narrow gate will not leave the Kingdom of God a boring place. It will not mean that others will likewise fail because you failed! The kingdom will be filled with people from the east, the west, the north and the south – which might be geographically distant from the place where the pure Word of God is routinely preached and heard:

“And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29).

What made the difference for those from far-flung places who heard the same message of truth heard by those who are nearer is that they strove to enter the narrow gate. They didn't pamper the flesh; they weren't slaves to the dictates of their own hearts. They crucified the flesh with Jesus. They earnestly committed themselves to do the will of God. They were truly thirsty for God's righteousness, and they were filled!

They were all for Christ and His truth, unlike those who were so familiar with the Word as to look upon it with diminished reverence. Unlike the longtime students of the Word whose interest was on the wane, the Word continually inspired awe in them.

The Last shall be First – but You can still be First by Attitude

Though late in hearing the Word, those enthusiastic new-comers spared no sacrifice and commitment to enter by the narrow gate and therefore could only be "first" in the kingdom. It's not about longevity; *it's about devotion*; it's about putting Christ first:

"And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last"
(Luke 13:30).

So don't rest on your laurels. Don't be complacent. Continually fan the fire of your zeal for God. Stay dedicated to Him and His truth at all times, not minding the discomfort and the pulls of the flesh. Enter by the narrow gate and stay put!

Remain vigilant, lest someone steals your crown:

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"
(Rev. 3:11).

Amen!