

The Narrow Gate

by John Edmiston

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Luke 13:23-30 EMTV *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, because 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 shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and answering He will 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, but yourselves being cast out. (29) And they will come from the east and the west, and the north and the south, and will recline to eat in the kingdom of God. (30) And behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last."*

Matthew 7:13-14 EMTV *"Enter in through the narrow gate; because wide is the gate, and broad is the way which leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in through it. (14) How narrow the gate, and confined the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it!"*

No one is entitled to the Kingdom of God through ethnicity or association or even through personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. Even people who ate and drank in His presence and heard His teaching can be lost eternally (Luke 13: 26 above).

The only entrance to the Kingdom of God is via faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; a living and active faith that is demonstrated as real through righteous living in obedience to His commandments. You cannot work iniquity and be saved (Luke 13:27 above).

This is a narrow way, through a narrow gate and Jesus says 'there are few who find it' (Matthew 7:14 above). It is the 'few' that are saved, not the many (Luke 13:23). The broad way is the general course of mankind and leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13). It is the way of sin, spiritual lethargy, idolatry and of man-made religion.

This parable of the narrow gate also tells us that time is limited. There comes a moment when the door is closed. Just as the door of Noah's Ark was closed by God, so there is a door of salvation. This door closes one day. When it is shut, no one can enter in.

From the parable of the ten virgins we can deduce that this time of closing is at the end of this age when the Lord returns:

Matthew 25:10-13 EMTV *"But as they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. (11) Afterward the remaining virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' (12) "But he answered and said, 'Assuredly I say to you, I do not know you.' (13) "Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

Mark's version of Jesus' teaching about the second coming also uses the 'door' metaphor:

Mark 13:24-29 EMTV *"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its radiance; (25) and the stars of heaven shall be falling out, and the powers in the heavens shall be shaken. (26) And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. (27) And then He will send His angels, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the extremity of earth to the extremity of heaven. (28) "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. (29) So also you, when you see these things coming to pass, know that it is near--at the doors!*

And John's gospel makes it clear that Jesus is the door and the narrow gate:

John 10:7-9 EMTV *Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. (8) All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. (9) I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture.*

There will come a time when salvation through Jesus Christ is no longer possible. A puzzling verse in Romans speaks of the 'fullness of the Gentiles'

Romans 11:25-26 EMTV *For I do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. (26) And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer shall come out of Zion, and He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob;*

So it seems that, first the complete number of the Gentiles are saved, then all the Jews are saved, then Christ returns and the door is closed forever.

In another sense you have a 'door' in your own heart, an inner room in your soul, where you can commune with God in secret (Matthew 6:6). Or you can hold the door shut – even when Christ is knocking:

Revelation 3:20 EMTV *Behold, I stand at the door and I am knocking. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and I will dine with him, and he with Me.*

He who closes the door of his soul against God will find out one day that it can no longer be opened!

When Jesus spoke to His Jewish audience He made it clear that they would be cast out, while Gentiles, from the north, the south, the east and the west would enter the Kingdom. They would see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom, but they themselves would be cast out because of their unbelief.

Jesus tells them to strive to enter through the narrow gate. Salvation is neither easy – for we must strive; nor is it automatic or universal – because the gate is narrow! Salvation is not on our terms. We must enter the narrow gate. It is a restricted space. We must do things God's way and believe in Christ – and not in anyone or anything else.

Acts 4:12 EMTV *Nor is there salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

John 14:6 EMTV *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

The striving is not the striving of works but the striving of faith. It takes effort to believe and to keep on in the faith despite life's trials. It takes effort to stay on the narrow path. The broad way always beckons us to our ruin. It takes effort to resist the Devil and to stick with the Truth when all the world around us is full of lies and deceit.

For the Jews the broad path was their traditional religion and its pride and stubbornness. For us it would be things such as worldliness, covetousness and the lure of the New Age.

Jesus tells the Jews that they would be shocked, dismayed and in anguish. There would be astonishment, pleading and anxiety. There would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. They would find themselves "OUT", when they thought that they were 'IN'.

Many assume they are saved – but some of those who are so complacent are actually not saved. They will cry "Lord. Lord.." and not understand how things turned out. They are the ones who take God's grace for granted. Who assume that because of their religious associations, their church attendance and their right doctrines that they will enter Heaven. Yet their lives are little different from the world, there is no obedience of faith, and they are workers of iniquity.

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

Jesus rebukes the whole idea of the existence of a privileged religious aristocracy from good families with wonderful religious connections. Heaven is not so obtained. The first will be last and the last will be first:

And behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last."

God does not care how many conferences you have attended or how many great speakers you have had dinner with or how many wonderful messages you have heard. You must believe for yourself and you must be diligent to press in through the narrow gate in order to inherit the Kingdom!

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