

“Make Every Effort”

October 4, 2020

Luke 13:22-30

I. Introduction

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. Luke wrote back in **Luke 9:51**, “**As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.**” As He went, He crisscrossed Judea—He even crossed the Jordan River to teach in Perea for a time. This wasn’t a sightseeing trip, Jesus was constantly teaching—in **Luke 4:43** “**He said, ‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.’**” The purpose of all the miracles, signs, and wonders Jesus performed wasn’t to entertain or even be part of a “social gospel,” it was to verify His identity and His message. The theme of His preaching was the kingdom of God—what it was and how one became part of this kingdom. **Mark 1:14-15** says, “**After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’**” This was Jesus’ message: “**Repent and believe.**” **John 1:12** adds, “**Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.**”

II. The Scene

Luke set the scene for a teaching on salvation: “**As he made his way to Jerusalem, someone asked him, ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?’**” The crowd that followed Jesus covered a wide spectrum from outright enemies to curiosity seekers to the very interested to the genuinely saved believers. We aren’t told where the questioner fit in, but this may have been an honest question. After nearly 3 years of ministry, countless miracles, unmatched teaching, and crowds of thousands following Him, there was still only a small number of people who believed in Him as their Savior. Even following Jesus’ ascension into heaven, **Acts 1:15** says that “**In those days Peter stood up among the believers—a group numbering about a hundred and twenty.**” It must have been puzzling to Jesus’ genuine followers that out of the large number of people that followed Him there were very few true believers. “**Are only a few people going to be saved?’**”

Jesus didn't answer the question. The important issue wasn't how many people are being saved; the important matter for each person is that he or she be one of them. Instead of focusing on the question of quantity, Jesus focused on the quality of a believer's faith. In His answer, Jesus gave an invitation to those present to receive the salvation He offered. Basically, Jesus was saying, "*Make sure you are saved.*"

III. Jesus' Invitation

A. Strive to enter by the narrow door. Jesus began by saying, "**Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.**" Jesus' invitation was certainly different from those that are heard from some tele-evangelists and others today who preach that God loves everyone unconditionally and desires to connect with sinners and fulfill all their personal dreams and ambitions. "*As long as you are sincere, that's what matters.*" Compared to this widespread, easy believism, Jesus said to "**make every effort, i.e., strive, to enter by the narrow door.**" The word "*strive*" which the NIV translated as "*make every effort*" is the Greek word **ἀγωνίζομαι** (agonizomai). It's the root for the word *agonize*. **ἀγωνίζομαι** means to fight or struggle. It describes an athlete giving his best to win the contest. This fight or struggle is one of self-denial that produces real repentance—**turn to Luke 9:23-24**. The message of the Gospel is not self-fulfillment—*a name it and claim it gospel*, but a message of self-denial. Faith in Christ costs the sinner his selfish goals and desires. It may separate him from his family (**Luke 14:26**), his possessions (**Mark 10:17-22**) and, as we just read in **Luke 9:24**, even his life. Salvation isn't easy.

It is true that a sinner can be saved only by God's grace, not by any of his own efforts—**Ephesians 2:8-9** says, "**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.**" But man does have a part. John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles called for sinners to repent, and that is still the church's message today. In **Acts 3:19** Peter said, "**Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of**

refreshing may come from the Lord.” Sinners are responsible for the choices they make and will be held accountable for not repenting and believing in the Savior.

The statement “strive to enter through the narrow door” emphasizes the intensity of the struggle through the narrow door and the idea that there is an exclusive route by which to enter. Matthew wrote about similar concept—turn to Matthew 7:13-14. The narrow door is a tight fit. “Many will try to enter and will not be able to.” To enter, one must get rid of his personal baggage—he must admit that he is a sinner, that he cannot save himself and then he must throw himself on God’s grace and mercy.

B. The door can be shut. Jesus went on to say, “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.’” This is a disturbing thought: the door can be shut. Once that is done, there will be no admission. The opportunity to enter the kingdom of God will be gone for those who are shut out. There is a sense of urgency here. As we saw a couple of weeks ago, there is a limit to God’s patience. Earlier is Luke 13:3, Jesus warned those who told him of Pilate’s slaughter of some Galileans, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish.” The story of the man giving a fig tree one more year to produce fruit symbolized the reality that all who lack the genuine fruit of salvation are living on borrowed time. Eventually, God’s patience toward those who reject the truth will end—for some at their death, for some while they still live—in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 Paul wrote three different times that because of “the sinful desires of their hearts” ... “God gave them over.” As Hebrews 9:27 reminds us, the final judgment will come after death.

Using the same picture as those of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus warned that those who miss their opportunity for salvation “will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.’” There is surprise and even horror at being permanently shut out of the kingdom of God. The door cannot be reopened. Jesus was warning, “Make sure you are truly saved today.”

C. There must be a personal relationship with Jesus. The Gatekeeper’s answer, the Lord’s “answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from’” gave the reason they will be shut out of the kingdom. Despite

their outward religious coverings and actions, they have no personal relationship or union with Christ. For salvation, there must be a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Salvation results in a shared life with Him—in [Galatians 2:20](#) Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Surprised by the denial, they “will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’” Being familiar with Jesus—eating and drinking with Him, listening to Him when He taught—doesn’t bring salvation. Jesus reply, “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers” makes that point. Being religious people, even ministering in Jesus’ name, living a religious and moral life doesn’t bring salvation. There must be a relationship with Him. They had never repented and been justified by God ([Romans 5:1](#)). They had never been declared righteous by having faith in Jesus Christ. They were still unrighteous evildoers. The sentence is final. Sadly, hell will be populated not only with irreligious rejectors of God, but also by those who were outwardly religious and reverently spoke of Him but never had a personal relationship with Him. They never truly made Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior ([Romans 10:9](#)).

D. Look to eternity. Jesus didn’t tell those listening to seek the satisfaction of their ambitions, desires, health, wealth, or anything else in this earthly life. Instead He called them to look to eternity—He directed their attention to hell. Jesus warned, “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth.” The torment of hell will not be limited to the pain of punishment, but will include remorse, shock, and surprise of those who ended up there despite thinking they were going to heaven. The more people know about the narrow gate, about the Gospel, the more severe their suffering in hell—turn to [Luke 12:47-48](#). One of the agonies of hell will be the remembrance of opportunities wasted.

For the Jews who reject Jesus’ call, an added agony will be “when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.” The Jewish people prided themselves on being the children of Abraham with all the promises God had made to him. They expected to

be saved from hell because they were Abraham's descendants. When they realize that their rejection of Jesus will forever keep them from their forefathers and the blessing of heaven, hell will be even more bitter for them. But even more painful than being left out of eternal life with their forefathers is the knowledge that their hated enemies, the Gentiles, "will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" from which they are excluded.

Jesus' concluding statement, "Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last," amplified the shock the lost Jews will feel. Not only will Gentiles be in the kingdom, but they will also be equal with the Jews who are there. As Paul wrote in Galatians 3:18, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

IV. Conclusion

In today's Scripture, Jesus issued a warning to those around Him and to us today. One can be close to the promise of God and yet miss it. Some people in the church assume that because they have been born into an attending family, they are in and will automatically receive God's blessing. Like the Jews who thought it was mostly a matter of heredity and cultural heritage, some call themselves Christians, not because of any faith commitment, but because of a family connection, a denominational affiliation or a cultural contact with Christianity, a contact that is seen by attendance at church twice a year (Christmas and Easter). Others call themselves Christians because of the culture in which they have been born—for years, the thought has been, anyone born in America is a Christian. Neither pedigree nor association saves anyone, entry through "the narrow door" means responding personally to Jesus Christ. Jesus' message is that God saves no one without genuine repentance. The battle to deny self and follow Christ is intense, the time is short, eternity is at stake. Make sure you are saved! Is Jesus truly your Lord as well as your Savior?

There's another point from Jesus' model invitation to salvation. We must make sure that we get the Gospel message right. A twisted, altered, easy invitation is powerless to save sinners. A watered-down message—a false evangelism—leaves people unconverted and bound for hell. Jesus never softened His

message to avoid offending people. He made them either feel bad enough to repent or furious enough to reject. We must not do any differently. In **Ezekiel 33:6** God said, “**If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.**”