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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“THE NARROW DOOR”**

**Luke 13:22-30**

? {Lk 13:5} *Have you repented, or will you perish?*  
 ? {Lk 13:9} *Are you fruitful, or will you be cut down?*  
 ? {Lk 13:28} *Will your best efforts result in joyous celebration, or “weeping...and gnashing of teeth”?*

Please turn with me to Luke 13:22-30.

■ Verse 22: **“Jesus [goes] through the towns and villages, teaching as he [makes] his way to Jerusalem.”**

○ {Mt 16:21} He has already alerted his disciples that **“he must go [there] and suffer many things... and... he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”**

○ You and I know how this is going to unfold: on the night of his betrayal the Messiah will **“[offer] up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who [can] save him from death, and he [will be] heard because of his reverent submission”** (Hebrews 5:7). Except that his Father will save him, not by *rescuing* him from the cross, but by *resurrecting* him out of the grave.

The shadow of death and the radiance of resurrection color all that follows, even though these words do not appear in our text.

■ In verse 23 **“Someone [asks] him, ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?’”**

● It could be that the questioner has been considering the warning Jesus issued a short while ago in Luke 13:2-5:

**“Do you think that these Galileans,”** whom Pilate slaughtered as they worshiped at the Temple,

**“were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”**

● Or perhaps he has been pondering the Parable of the Fig Tree in verses 6-9:

**“A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’**

**‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”**

{Morris, 247} Or maybe he has heard rabbis debate the issue. They have reached consensus that **“all Israel [will] be saved, except for a few blatant sinners who [have] excluded themselves,”** but they

disagree about which Jews are “**blatant sinners,**” and which Gentiles (if any) will also be saved.

Regardless, the man asks “**Are only a few people going to be saved?**”

■ In response Christ Jesus answers a different question. 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.**”

? *What is “the narrow door”?* The Savior does not unpack the image, but from the context we know that it is the way into salvation.

¶ He confirms this in Matthew 7:13-14: “**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.**”

“**Life**” is shorthand for salvation: namely, a new and full life here and now, and eternal life with bodily resurrection in the future. Thus, the objective is to “**enter**” life (or salvation) “**through the narrow door.**”

? But *what is the “narrow door”?*

○  Once again, the Lord does not define his terminology. But in John 10:7 and 9 he proclaims “**I am the gate for the sheep. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.**” The Greek θύρα (thura) means both *door* and *gate*, so “**I am the gate**” is identical to “**I am the door.**”

○ Equally, in John 14:6 he declares “**I am the way**” (that is, the “**narrow...road**”) “**and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

⊗ Putting it all together Jesus instructs us to ‘*Enter salvation through me.*’ This does not require much explanation; it does require action!

■ That takes us back to verse 24. In reply to the initial question, Messiah does not specify whether “**only a few**” or more than “**a few people**” will be saved (though he does caution us that many will fail to enter). That is not his main concern; **his priority is the command, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”**

? We ask Jesus, *Will the saved be few?* He asks us a more urgent question: *Will the saved be you?*

 To that end we must αγωνιζομαι [agōnizomeye], must “**Make every effort.**” In battle this is *contending with an adversary*. On the athletic field it is *competing* with all one’s might *for a prize*. More generally it means *to strive, to endeavor, to labor fervently*. Αγωνιζομαι is about giving it your all, shedding blood, sweat and tears, agonizing to achieve your objective.

Entering salvation through Jesus is a goal worthy of total effort. It is the purpose that deserves everything, up to and including our last drop of energy and final breath. “**Αγωνιζομαι to enter through the narrow door.**”

🔔 Am I tripping any theological alarms with this? If so, consider this: 1<sup>st</sup>, these are not my words; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Scripture does draw lines between grace and law, faith and works – but not as precisely and definitely as

many believers do; and 3<sup>rd</sup>, the apostle Paul, *the go-to guy* for the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone, exhorts us **“to work out [our] salvation”** (Philippians 2:12), and he also speaks of his own commitment to **“[attain] ... resurrection”** and **“to win the prize”** in heaven (Philippians 3:11, 14).

**“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door”** is not works righteousness! If it were, **“many”** who **“will try”** but fail **“to enter”** might well succeed.

✪ Here is the critical distinction: those who receive salvation agonize **“to enter,”** not through circumcision, or a clean diet, or the Ten Commandments, or a set of convictions about alcohol or sexuality or abortion – they **“αγωνιζομαι to enter through”** Jesus.

○ Someone will protest: There is no agony in entering through the Messiah! Hear his words in Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23: **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”**

To deny the self, including the value of one’s own efforts to earn salvation, is painful. To take up the cross is to endure agony of the body and/or mind and/ or soul (after all, the cross is by definition excruciating). To follow Jesus requires both of these.

○ ✪ {Ro 6:2-5} Salvation by grace through faith in Christ is free, indeed – but it is not cheap. It cost the Son of God his life, and it will cost us ours. As Paul explains, it is those who die with Jesus and are buried with Jesus who will **“be united with him in a resurrection like his.”**

?! So it is imperative to ask: *Am I making “every effort to enter through the narrow door?”*

○ {Heb 4:12-13; 2 Ti 3:15; Jer 17:9} For us to answer honestly and accurately we need the Holy Spirit to convict and affirm us, and the Scriptures to penetrate our souls. In kindness and mercy God **“[uncovers] and [lays] bare” “the thoughts and attitudes of the heart,”** not to humiliate us, but so we might be made **“wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”**

○ {Jer 17:9} Yet the human **“heart is deceitful above all things.”** We are adept at pulling the wool over our own eyes, especially in regard to our spiritual condition.

■ The Savior illustrates our capacity for self-deceit in Luke 13:25-27:

**“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!’”**

Proximity to Jesus through birth into a “Christian” home or immersion in a “Christianized” culture will not cut it. Exposure to his teachings at church or through Bible study will not get you in the door. Many seemingly “Good Christian People” who “**try to enter**” will be shocked to discover that they are “**not able to.**”

■ Hence, this bleak prophecy in verse 28: “**There will be weeping there**” (inconsolable grief) “**and gnashing of teeth**” (unquenchable anger) “**when you see [others] in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.**”

■ But there is good news as well! Verse 29: “**People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.**”

○ {Rev 7:9} The four directions are a reference to diversity, for “**A great multitude that no one [can] count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,**” will “**enter through the narrow door.**”

■ That vast host will include people whom we have written-off as unsalvageable. Verse 30: “**Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.**”

? *Will it include us?*

Kind and merciful God, grant that we might “**make every effort to enter through the narrow door**”!

Welcome us into your salvation, for the sake of your Son Jesus who died that we might live and who lives again that we might never die! Amen.