

# "Are there just a few who are being saved?"

"The "narrow door."

**Luke 13:22** And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

The one who brought this question to the Lord remains unnamed. Edersheim says he was a "... representative of the Pharisees."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps that is true. Certainly he was one of the company that either encountered Jesus or followed Him on His way to Jerusalem. Some say that the question was innocent inquiry; others say the Jews opposed to Jesus advanced the question to cause antipathy and opposition among the nationalistic Israelites. Many Israelites held that the "few" were Israel, and the "many" were the Gentiles.

Jesus did not answer him directly, but told them all to attend to their own salvation. The Lord's word "strive" means to take pains, exert yourself; in fact, strain every nerve to enter. "For many ...will seek to enter and will not be able."

The Lord's words are reminiscent of Matthew 7:13, where He said,

**Matt. 7:13** "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. 14 "For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

The Lord's words in Matthew are in the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount where He described the outcomes of certain character traits, and outlined the behaviors that are characteristic of those who are on the pathway to life.

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<sup>1</sup> Edersheim, A., *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 298.

Regrettably, only the “few” will have the devotion and dedication to Christ that are the distinguishing and distinctive traits of the saved. The “many” will allow themselves to be seduced by the world, that is, drawn to the world of goods, endowments, riches, advantages, methods, and pleasures, which although hollow and temporary, stir desire, and seduce from God; this is the broad and easy way because it is the way along which a person is propelled by his fleshly desires.

The readings in Luke remind us of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. When they might have entered the land of promise their hearts melted for fear of the inhabitants of the land. Their hesitation, and misdirected fear, angered the Lord. Only two, Joshua and Caleb, found favor in God’s sight. Of that generation all but two perished without entering the Promised Land.

That generation of Israelites learned that they did not have a lock on their place in the land of promise. The same may be said of the generation that witnessed the works of Jesus with respect to a place in the kingdom of God. The Pharisees—and many of the Jews—believed that their part in the Messianic Kingdom was theirs as a matter of course. They thought it was provided for them by their heritage in Abraham. To them, being born a Jew was enough to guarantee their part in the world to come. In that kingdom they would enjoy the fellowship of the fathers, and live in splendor while the Gentiles suffered without.

The Lord rejected that idea. All must struggle to enter the kingdom. The casual observer has no part in the world to come. It matters not whether the person is Jew or Gentile. What matters is the earnest response on the part of the person who encounters Christ. Anything less than serious intentions will avail nothing. Visible efforts will identify the one with the determination to enter.

In the roll call of the supporters who gathered at Hebron to help David secure his kingdom from Saul were the men of Zebulun. The Bible says in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 1 Chronicles,

**1 Chr. 12:33** Of Zebulun, there were 50,000 who went out in the army, who could draw up in battle formation with all kinds of weapons of war and helped *David* with an undivided heart.

These are the type of the servants of the Lord. They are familiar with all the kinds of weapons for the spiritual warfare, and they serve with an undivided heart. Their striving has a single purpose—serve the King of the kingdom of God.

But “struggle” or “striving” is not the central idea in the answer Jesus made to the questioner. “Door” is the central idea in Luke. The Pharisees were already struggling, but struggling in the wrong way. John tells us that Jesus said once,

**John 10:1** ”Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 “But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 “When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 “And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 Jesus therefore said to them again, “Truly, truly, 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 through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

It is essential that the person desiring to enter the kingdom of God enter through Jesus. It makes no sense to be looking for the entrance to the kingdom in another place.

There is the story about the two golfers. One of them hit his ball into the rough. After watching it sail out into the brush and trees he said, "I'll have to look for my ball." His fellow-golfer said, "OK. I'll go back to the clubhouse to get my other nine iron while you look for your ball." The second golfer returned a while later to find his partner walking in circles on the fairway looking at the ground. "What are you doing?" the second golfer asked. "I thought your ball went into the woods." "It did, but it's easier to look here."

Looking for the kingdom God requires that we look in the right place. We just might have to look "...in the rough." Strive to enter by the Door. And that is a narrow way. Moreover, that narrow way is many times hedged about by difficulties.

Are there "...just a few who are being saved?" Yes. Sadly it is true because people insist on looking elsewhere than Jesus. Some refuse to rely on the word of God. Others lay emphasis on a religious heritage that has come down to them through relatives, or through national heritage. Many insist on their own personal performance of good works. Still others see religion as an outward expression, as ceremony and pretense, and reject any meaningful inward effect on the heart.

The people who insist that they be allowed to look for salvation on their own terms will come to the door of the kingdom of God and find the door shut. People who tell themselves they will devote their lives to the Lord after they have settled an account, finished a personal task, or reached a personal goal are deluding themselves with the reassurances of the procrastinator. They are seeking to enter on their own terms, and as procrastinators will find the door shut.

**Luke 13:25** "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know 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 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.'

Once the priests in the temple challenged Jesus' authority to teach and He answered them with a parable.

**Matt. 21:28** "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. 30 "And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. 31 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They \*said, "The latter." Jesus \*said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

In a way it is a matter of commonsense who will be saved. It is they who respond in genuine, heartfelt obedience.

## The Plea of the Procrastinators.

Some of the people who heard Jesus followed him. Many did not. Of those who did not follow some may have intended to become devoted disciples, but delayed for one reason or another. Luke tells us, "

**Luke 9:57** And as they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." 60 But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." 61 And another

also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” 62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

To delay in one’s service to the Lord, or to put off to some indefinite future a duty or a commitment to His service is to deny Him. Unbelief and Procrastination are brothers. Procrastinators are like those in Ezekiel about whom the prophet wrote,

**Ezek. 12:21** Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 22 “Son of man, what is this proverb you *people* have concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The days are long and every vision fails?’

**Ezek. 12:26** Furthermore, the word of the Lord came to me saying, 27 “Son of man, behold, the house of Israel is saying, ‘The vision that he sees is for many years *from now*, and he prophesies of times far off.’

The Procrastinator’s excuse is, “I have time. I have plenty of time to dedicate myself in the future.

Others indulge themselves while the Lord’s work languishes as in Haggai, where the prophet wrote,

**Haggai 1:1** In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest saying, 2 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘This people says, “The time has not come, *even* the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.”’” 3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, 4 “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house *lies* desolate?” 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, “Consider your ways! 6 “You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is not enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing,

but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes.”

The Israelites had many excuses for failure to rebuild the temple—“...it was not yet seventy years and the captivity was not complete, or we are surrounded by hostile people, or the government resists our undertaking, or the harvest requires much work, or my own house must be attended.” The result was the same. The Lord’s temple remained incomplete while the people lived in vaulted houses that were elaborately adorned with emblems and devices. They indulged themselves and they remained as unsatisfied as the Lord’s temple remained incomplete—because they had neglected the things of first importance.

The difference between the Israelites of Haggai’s day and the people of today—who indulge themselves while the Lord’s work languishes—is only superficial. Their priorities are to indulge and satisfy themselves while telling themselves they are worshippers of Christ. Yet a worshipper is one who denies himself in order to serve the object of worship—God. Many churchgoers choose a church because they believe it meets their needs for social interaction, or fulfills a desire they have for entertainment. Religious hucksters know this and employ marketing campaigns in which they offer church “services” in order to bring in large numbers of membership candidates to fill their pews. Yet, personal indulgence is not the door through which one may enter into the kingdom of heaven. And “service” is to be directed to the Lord, not at the follower.

After the Lord has shut the door on them it will be too late. On that day they will argue,

**Luke 13:26** “We ate and drank in Your presence...”

There is a certain intimacy and fellowship in taking a meal with someone. Even so, it is merely an association. It is as Simon the Pharisee learned—he is the one who once entertained the Lord at dinner—there is more to religion than mere outward form. The One who looks on the heart

requires mercy, compassion and love in His disciples, and to Himself, He requires unwavering loyalty.

As some of the 5000 who ate the bread and fish no doubt learned—eating and drinking what the Lord has prepared avails only for the moment if that is all they desire. Even though they ate and drank in His presence, if His words did not penetrate to their hearts, if they were unwilling to leave food and drink behind to serve Him, then the association availed them nothing.

**Luke 13:26** “You taught in our streets...”

We saw you. We knew of you. We were friendly toward you. We tolerated your preaching and did not cause you to stop. But mere association or tolerance cannot substitute for service to, union with, and loyalty to Jesus.

God blessed the Jews with many prophets. He multiplied the blessing by sending His Son. Regrettably, many of the Jews rejected the calls that came from Jesus, and then from His apostles. In the end only a remnant of them remained according to the election of grace (Romans 11:5). So, are there just a few of them being saved?

The answer is clear.

Moreover, the Gentiles have also received the gracious offer of Jesus; yet, the many of them have rejected the call. Today, the greater number of the people of the world show little, if any, interest in the spiritual truth underlying the death, burial and resurrection of the Christ. Yet it is the resurrection of the Christ that is the door to salvation from a world condemned to suffer in the present, and ultimately to perish. That present day interest is so low may be seen in the attitudes of humanity, and their daily choices for other than the spiritual food that God holds out to them in the person of His Son.

Consider carefully what the Apostle Peter said to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem after he had told them how the lame man had been healed,

**Acts 4:10** “...let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus

Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. 11 “He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the very corner *stone*. 12 “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”

There is salvation in no one else! Hear what Peter said.