

“SALVATION’S NARROW DOOR”

**I. Introduction**

- A. The celebration of Easter last Sunday saw many people attending worship services who do not otherwise go to church very often.
- B. I think we can safely say that some of the non-Christians who attended worship services last Sunday were in churches where they heard the gospel clearly explained.
- C. And it seems likely that most of the non-Christians who heard the gospel in worship services last Sunday are still non-Christians as of today.
- D. Now why is this the case?
- E. Why don’t people who hear the gospel run to Jesus Christ so that they can receive the salvation that he freely gives to all who will believe in him?
- F. This passage from Luke’s Gospel speaks to this question.
- G. It does so by telling us that the only entrance into the way of salvation is a narrow door, a door that will one day be closed forever.

**II. Entry Is on God’s Terms**

- A. Our text begins with another reference to the fact that, at this point in Jesus’s ministry, he has his eyes directed toward Jerusalem.
  - 1. Even as he continues to teach throughout various Israelite towns and villages, he knows where he is heading.
  - 2. Nothing can distract him from the task that lies ahead of him.
  - 3. As Luke said several chapters earlier in this Gospel, at this point Jesus has “set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

4. He is on his way to the city where he knows he will die on a cross.
- B. As Jesus continues to journey toward Jerusalem, someone in the crowd asks him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?"
1. In all likelihood, this question was prompted by the things that Jesus had been teaching.
  2. In the preceding chapters of Luke, Jesus pronounced a series of woes on the Pharisees and teachers of the law.
  3. He told his followers to acknowledge him in the face of opposition.
  4. He warned that many people will be unprepared for the arrival of the last day.
  5. He said that he came to bring division rather than peace.
  6. He compared Israel to a barren fig tree that is about to be cut down.
  7. He likened the coming of his kingdom to a tiny mustard seed.
  8. These things, paired with the mounting opposition to Jesus among the religious leaders, left people wondering.
  9. After all, they thought that all Israelites would share in the kingdom, with the obvious exception of those who were especially notorious sinners.
  10. Was Jesus saying that salvation will only be enjoyed by a just a few people?
- C. As is often the case, Jesus does not give a direct answer to this man's question.
1. Instead, he puts the focus on the urgency of entering into the way of salvation.

2. As one commentator puts it, Jesus essentially “turns the question from ‘Will the saved be few?’ to ‘Will you be among the saved?’” [Bock]
3. Jesus says, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”
4. One of the things that this tells us is that entry into heaven is not automatic.
5. This confronts a belief that is held by a great many people in our day, the belief that the only thing that you have to do to get to heaven is die.
6. Jesus says you have to strive to enter through the narrow doorway that leads to salvation.
7. The Greek word that is translated as “strive” in this verse is the word from which we get our English term ‘agonize.’
8. It implies great exertion and effort.
9. Paul uses this term in Colossians 4:12 to describe how Epaphras was always “struggling” in prayer for the Christians in Colossae.
10. He also uses this term in 1 Timothy 6:12 when he says, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”
11. Now, the fact that Jesus exhorts us to strive to enter through the narrow door does not mean that we can attain salvation by our works.
12. He is simply telling us that we have to listen to the things that he says, respond to him in faith, and then persevere in that faith.
13. This is made clear in John 6, where Jesus responds to the question, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” by saying,

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (Jn. 6:28–29)

- D. Jesus’s use of the word “strive” in this text makes me think of the times when I have been in a large crowd where everyone is trying to squeeze in through the doors of a subway car before those doors close.
1. There is a sense of urgency, a feeling that you need to push your way forward to ensure that you will have a spot.
  2. If you are too polite, you’re not going to get in.
  3. This is a picture of how a believer enters the kingdom of God.
  4. When a person is enabled by the Holy Spirit to see what is at stake when it comes to the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, that person will not let anything prevent him from entering through the narrow door into heaven that had been opened by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- E. In the second half of verse 24, Jesus speaks of people who will seek to enter through the door, but will not be able to do so.
1. This is referring to those who will only see their need to enter through the narrow door when it is too late.
  2. The point here is that today is the day of salvation.
  3. Today is the day when the gospel’s offer of salvation to everyone who will lay hold of Jesus Christ by faith is being proclaimed throughout the world.
  4. But a day is coming when this offer will expire, a day is coming when the narrow door will be shut and can never be opened again.
  5. If you don’t receive Christ while he is being offered to you, if you fail to go through the door while it is being held open, you will be shut out of God’s kingdom forever.

- F. Why does Jesus liken the way of salvation to a narrow door?
1. There are a number of reasons.
  2. For one thing, it is narrow because it can only be entered by those who are poor in spirit.
  3. You have to acknowledge your sin, mourn over it, and humbly look to Jesus as your only hope.
- G. The door is also narrow because it is costly to enter through it.
1. While salvation is free, you have to lose your life to Jesus in order to receive it.
  2. All who enter through the narrow door have to submit to Christ's Lordship and live as his disciple.
- H. Another reason why the door is narrow is because it is exclusive.
1. There is only one door that leads to salvation.
  2. Contrary to what many people believe, all paths do not lead to God.
  3. On the contrary, all paths except the gospel of Jesus Christ lead to hell.
  4. While this claim sounds exceedingly arrogant to many people in our pluralistic society, it is the clear teaching of Scripture.
- I. One other reason why the door is narrow, especially in our context, is the fact that biblical Christianity is increasingly seen as a threat to our culture's social stability.
1. The teachings of the Bible are sometimes denounced as bigoted and on the wrong side of history.

2. Those who enter through the narrow door have to be willing to endure the world's scorn for the sake of Christ.

### III. Entry Is Not Secured by Having an Outward Connection to Jesus

- A. In verse 25, Jesus further develops his response to the question that he was asked in verse 23 by employing what might be called a mini-parable.
  1. He says that when the master of the house shuts the door to his house, those who are still outside will knock and ask to be admitted.
  2. But the master will not re-open the door to them.
  3. He will turn them away, saying, "I do not know where you come from."
  4. And he will persist in saying this even after the people protest, saying, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets."
- B. The point that Jesus is making by telling this mini-parable is that an outward familiarity with him is not enough to secure entry into heaven.
  1. There were many first century Jews who had firsthand contact with Jesus.
  2. They heard his teaching in person.
  3. They were eyewitnesses of his miracles.
  4. But this was not sufficient to ensure their salvation.
  5. Merely having an outward association with Jesus Christ, whether in person or through contact with the Bible or the church, does not give a person an inheritance in heaven.

6. The only way anyone can be saved is by having a personal faith in Jesus Christ.
  7. Apart from him, no matter how good people think they are, God looks upon them and calls them “workers of evil.”
  8. This may sound harsh, but it is what we all are in and of ourselves.
  9. From God’s perspective, which is the perspective of his absolute holiness, everything that we do is polluted by sin.
  10. This is why the only way to eternal life is to know Jesus as he is revealed in the gospel and to receive the righteousness that he bestows as a free gift.
- C. Many of the Jews in Jesus’s day rejected him.
1. They did this in spite of the fact that they considered themselves to be heirs of the kingdom of God.
  2. Jesus tells the people in this crowd that those among them who do not truly know him will see the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament enjoying the great end-times feast while they are shut outside.
  3. Moreover, they will see people who have come from all over the earth sitting at table with those Old Testament saints.
  4. The Gentiles who believe will be welcomed into the kingdom, but those Jews who were only members of God’s people outwardly will not gain entry.
  5. Though they were the first to hear God’s promise of salvation, they will not inherit that salvation if they fail to trust in Jesus, because he is the one in whom all of God’s promises find their fulfillment.
  6. The same principle applies to anyone today who has an outward connection to Christ or his church but is not willing to lay hold of

Christ by faith.

- D. In verse 28, Jesus says that those who are shut out of God's kingdom will be relegated to the place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."
1. This is a description of hell, the place of eternal punishment for those who die in their sins.
  2. This brief description of hell calls our attention to the urgency of making sure that you get through salvation's narrow door.
  3. Jesus's teaching here makes it clear that there is only one alternative to entering through the narrow door.
  4. And make no mistake, that alternative is terrible.
  5. Some people have a mistaken notion of what hell will be like.
  6. They think of it as a place where they can enjoy the pleasures of sin without restraint.
  7. That is not at all what hell will be like.
  8. There will not be any pleasure in hell.
  9. All pleasure is ultimately derived from God.
  10. He is the source of all that is good and enjoyable.
  11. But hell is the place where people will be cut off from the favorable presence of God for all eternity.
  12. Hell is the place where people will be subject to the wrathful presence of God for all eternity.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. This passage tells us that it is possible for a person to think that he is already inside the kingdom of God when in reality he is not.
- B. A person may do all sorts of good works, may associate with good people, may think of himself as a basically good person, and may even attend church on a regular basis, but if that person does not have a personal faith in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, that person is still outside the kingdom.
- C. This is why it is so important for us to make sure that we are in Christ.
- D. He himself is the narrow door.
- E. That door is still standing open today.
- F. But it will not remain open forever.
- G. As J.C. Ryle puts it, "A day is coming on the earth when the patience of God towards sinners shall have an end. The door of mercy, which has been so long open, shall at last be shut. The fountain opened for all sin and uncleanness shall at length be closed. The throne of grace shall be removed, and the throne of judgment shall be set up in its place. The great assize of the world shall begin. All that are found impenitent and unbelieving shall be thrust out forever from God's presence. Men shall find that there is such a thing as 'the wrath of the Lamb.' (Rev. 6:16.)"
- H. Make sure that you are one who is striving to enter through the narrow door by believing in Jesus Christ and by persevering in your faith, warring against sin, the world, and the devil all your days.