

Is the Door to Heaven Narrow?

A survey conducted by the Gallup polling organization in 1990 revealed that 60% of Americans believe there is a hell. But, when asked where they thought they were going when they died only 4% believed that hell was their own personal destination.

The truth is, hell and judgement aren't something we like to think about. Especially when it comes to the possibility of us ending up there.

We like the idea of most people making it somehow.

The Rabbis of Jesus day often debated the issue of who would find salvation. The general consensus was that those of Jewish birth would be forgiven, and a few righteous Gentiles might make it too.

As Jesus traveled the countryside of Judea preaching it became obvious that He was saying things that challenged many of the religious teachers of His day. This prompted an interesting question from someone along the way.

Turn Luke 13:22 Pg 1010 Read vs 22-23 through "saved."

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Messiah, He quoted the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 40:5 which says: *And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.* In the mind of the Israelites, this meant the restoration of the nation Israel and the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and the people of Israel throughout the Old Testament. It also meant an individual's participation in this kingdom of God.

Very clearly when this guy asks Jesus the question, "Are there few who are saved"? he's got individuals in mind. He's asking, "are just a few going to make it in eternity?"

Biblical "salvation" refers primarily to deliverance from God's final judgment. The Bible says that unless we are delivered from God's final judgment, we will spend eternity in conscious alienation from him. This is usually known as "hell" or "the lake of fire." You see a familiar description of it in verse 28 *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* Other passages call it "outer darkness" or "the fire that is not quenched."

Now, I don't know what you personally think of the concept of eternal punishment. Some people accept it, some people scoff, and others aren't sure.

But I want you to notice something very significant about this passage. First of all, Jesus' audience accepted the concept of final judgment; they were concerned with things like how many people were going to escape from it.

Second Jesus doesn't turn to this man and say, "Saved from what?" Jesus believes in the truth of eternal punishment. He speaks about hell more than He does heaven. Not because He enjoys the subject, but because He's burdened that people realize hell's reality. Jesus doesn't want people to go to hell.

He, more than any other person who ever walked the face of the earth knows about the horrors of God's judgment for sin.

Hell is real. Eternal punishment is real. That's why salvation ought to be at the top of our priority list.

In our passage for today, Jesus doesn't immediately answer the question of how many will be saved.

Instead, He turns the question from the generic to the personal. As He does we're going to see two truths with everlasting consequences.

I. *The Doorway to Salvation is Narrow*

Read 23b-24a (through "gate")

Jesus is saying, "Before you get all preoccupied with how many are being saved from God's final judgment, you'd better make sure you are saved."

The way is narrow. Listen to Jesus on the same subject in Matthew 7: *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."*

In 1844 a religion known as Baha'ism was started. In just 150 years Baha'is have grown to more than 5 million followers worldwide with 1,700 Spiritual Assemblies in the United States alone.

Bahai'ism is based on 12 divine principles the third being: *There is but one GOD, by whatever name HE is called. There is but one human race. There can be but one religion. But this one religion has many Speakers, and many expressions.*

...One reason why there have been many Revelers of the Word of God is so that all mankind should receive it. Revelation is progressive, and each manifestation of God answers the need of his time.

One of the reasons Baha'ism is popular is that it makes room for everybody. The revealers of the word of God are identified as: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, and Baha'u'llah.

In 1893 the first Parliament was a result of religious leaders desiring peace and harmony among the world's religions, which would in turn foster peace and harmony among nations.

One hundred years later, the second Parliament promoted awareness of the universal truth embodied in all major religions.

The third Parliament of World Religions was held in December, 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa. To quote the sponsors: *"There was magic in having over 4,000 interfaith activists from around the world just being together, sharing the cause, and committed to one purpose - uniting humanity as one spiritual family."*

This included everybody from Benedictine monks to Hindu gurus to followers of Wicca.

What a striking contrast when we read the words of Jesus!

According to Jesus, there's a broad path that a lot of people are on headed for spiritual destruction. All religions aren't right. All teachers don't teach truth. In fact the way to God is narrow. Few find it.

Those are sobering words.

The Doorway to Salvation is Narrow. Let me share with you the Biblical perspective on how narrow it is. Jesus said: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

The Bible declares: *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

The "narrow gate" means that the way of salvation is narrow. There aren't a bunch of

ways to salvation-there's only one way. The way, according to the Bible, is Jesus Christ himself and his death on the cross for our sins. Jesus is the only way because only he's paid the penalty for our sins.

So the why does Luke say "strive?" Ephesians 2:8&9 say: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Jesus did the work of salvation by dying on the cross. He even said, "It is finished" with His dying breath.

The word "strive" sounds like we need to do something to earn our salvation. Actually, it describes three things about saving faith. The word translated "strive" is the Greek word *agonizomai*. You can hear our English word "agonize" in that word. It was often used of athletes striving in the Greek athletic games.

One writer gave this explanation: "unless a person is looking diligently for the gate, he is not likely to know that it is there."

The struggle involved here concerns finding the right gate to enter. Jesus' point is that those who don't know the way to eternal life should exert every effort to find out what it is. If there's only one way then we want to make sure that's the way we're on.

Hebrews 11:6 says that *God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

In Acts 17:27 Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God has set up mankind "so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

There's a second aspect to that word *agonizomai*. A few months from the time of Luke 13 and Jesus will be in Jerusalem, about to be arrested and crucified. Luke 22:44 gives us a graphic picture of what He went through emotionally and spiritually the night of His arrest: *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Jesus agonized over what He was facing. The sinless Son of God would become sin for us on the cross. The One who had lived for all eternity in perfect harmony with the Father was going to be rejected.

There's a sense in which this word doesn't mean effort, but anguish. If we agonize over something we're in anguish over it.

I believe one of the main reasons why people reject God's message of salvation is because they don't want to admit their sin and failure. It's a whole lot more inviting to say my sincerity or my good works, or my religion makes me acceptable to God. I'm not so bad. I've earned my own way.

It hurts to admit you deserve God's judgment; it's painful to agree you need grace and mercy. Humbling yourself before God to do this is one of the hardest things you'll ever do.

The third facet of the word "Strive" is that it brings in a note of urgency.

Read vs 24b-25

The point is not that God runs out of willingness to save us, but that we run out of time. The opportunity for salvation is limited. We can all be rescued from God's final judgment through faith in Jesus Christ, but we only have a limited amount of time to make this decision.

In the year 2000, 97,300 people in the U.S. died of accidents. Almost 1 million Americans die of Cardiovascular Disease each year. Over 1 / 2 million will die of Cancer this year.

We are frail, mortal people who are only around here a few years at best. When death comes our chance is over.

Not only that, but the Bible says that one day Christ is going to return. In a sense God is going to shut the door. After that will be a horrible time the Bible calls the great tribulation. You can read about it in the Book of Revelation. It will be a time when God says in effect, "You people on planet earth want your way instead of my way. You've got it!" He'll lift the divine restraints on evil and sin will have it's full effect.

Then He'll add His judgment to the effects of the unrestrained sin of people. This is going to be a time like no other in all of human history.

There will be multitudes saved during that time but, as I read Scripture, most of them won't be people who knew the truth and rejected it before Christ comes. It's going to be very difficult for them to believe.

See, it isn't the narrowness of the door which ultimately will be the biggest problem, but the "closedness" of the door. It doesn't matter how wide a door is when it is closed.

The door is open, but narrow. There's only one door. The door will soon be closed.

There is no second chance, as some cults teach. The Bible consistently says that the decision you make about Jesus in this life has binding eternal implications. Heb 9:27 *it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment...*

No reincarnation. No second chances. That's why the Bible says, *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

What's the urgency? You can't guarantee you'll be alive 25 hours from now, let alone 25 years from now. The time to believe it is now.

You might be thinking, "Ed I need more evidence." What you say sounds true but I'm not sure. I'm going to read the Bible for myself and find out."

That's valid--as long as you're really seeking the evidence and not just using it as an excuse to put off a decision to trust Christ.

Read vs 26-27

On that day, people will protest: "*You visited my town . . . I heard you teach*" The parallel in Matt. 7 adds some even more compelling protests: "*I prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and did many wonders in Your name.*"

We'd say, "I taught Sunday school. I belonged to a church. I got baptized. I took communion regularly. I served as a volunteer."

Jesus doesn't deny these things are good. He doesn't view them as unimportant. But he says they are not what counts when it comes to being delivered from God's judgment.

In fact those good things turn into "works of iniquity" (sinful) if we depend upon them to get us to heaven instead of depending on the finished work of Christ.

He's going to say, "I do not know you, where you are from." That means "I never knew you, there was never any genuine relationship between us."

The basis of salvation is personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It's not whether you know about Christ_it's whether you know him. It's not what you did for Christ_it's whether you've allowed him to know you personally.

This helps to understand the next verses . . .

Read vs 28-30

Jesus finally answers the man's original question: "Yes, many will be saved_but not necessarily the ones you were thinking of."

Remember, this was all in the context of Judaism. As we've seen here in these last chapters of Luke, the Jewish people thought they were OK with God because of their birth.

Judaism is a religion. Anyone can become a proselyte to Judaism by taking the proper steps.

But becoming a proselyte doesn't change your physical heritage. The Jewish people as a race descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. The people Jesus was speaking to were physical Israelites.

Because God blessed the Israelites and made them so many special promises, they thought they were saved because of their birth. They thought they would be in God's Kingdom and most everyone else would suffer God's wrath.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be there but those Jewish people who rejected Jesus would be cast out. There'll be people from all over; north, south, east and west. All the people the Israelites thought were lost would have representatives in the kingdom.

In fact, Rev 5:9 pulls the curtain back on this awesome heavenly scene: *And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*

When I was a brand new believer I went to the student union at IUP and shared my faith with anyone who'd listen. I remember one guy who argued that all religions led to God and he quoted Luke 13:29 to prove it. They'd come from the east, west, north, and south. Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad.

They'd all come and sit down together. At the time I wasn't sure how to answer that, except to say the Jesus claimed to be the only way. Now I'd say, "Start at verse 22 and read the context. He had it completely backwards.

The gate is narrow. Jesus said in Joh 10:9 *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved..."*

I have to believe there's going to be some real suprizes in eternity. Many who expect to be there won't be--but many who they expect won't be there will be.

Many "religious" people will not be saved, while many "sinners" (like the thief on the cross) will be saved because they acknowledge their need for Jesus' forgiveness and respond to his invitation to know him personally.

I. The Doorway to Salvation is Narrow

II. The Heart of God is Immeasurably Wide

Read vs 31

At this time Jesus was in a section of the country known as Perea. Perea isn't a name you read in the NT but it was used by the historian Flavius Josephus, and others. It's a section of the territory east of The Jordan River, opposite Judea and Samaria, what we would call the Kingdom of Jordan today. John The Baptist baptized in Perea, and was also martyred there at Herod's fortress.

The Jewish religious leaders wanted to get Jesus back west again into Judea where they could watch Him and ultimately trap Him, so they tried to put the fear of Herod in Him.

"Jesus answered them", vs 32 read (32+33)

Herod had murdered John the Baptist and feared that Jesus was John come back from the dead so the rumors might have had some truth to them.

But Jesus was on a mission. Back in verse 22 Luke told us Jesus was journeying toward Jerusalem. He was following a divine timetable and He was right where He was supposed to be.

He was doing the will of God according to the Father's schedule. It had been decreed from eternity that the Son of God would be crucified in Jerusalem at the Passover.

Even Herod Antipas, with the full authority of Rome itself, couldn't hinder the purposes and plans of God.

The way may be narrow, but the heart of God is wide open to sinners. The Jewish leaders told Jesus He was in danger. The truth is, they were the ones in danger.

Read vs 34-35a (Through "desolate")

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Everything about the character of God cries out mercy and grace. But there was judgment coming from the hand of God.

These are touching words from the lips of Jesus. This isn't anger. It's anguish.

You know what's interesting? Both word "anger" and "anguish" come from the same Indo-European root. It means "tight" or "painfully constricted."

When your angry you tense up and your muscles become tight. When your in anguish you feel the heaviness of emotion like you're being squeezed. Like your going through the ringer.

That's where Jesus was emotionally at this point. His compassionate heart was broken.

When we went to Nicaragua five months ago my wife Sandy took an illustrated children's story with her called "Snowflake the Lamb" just in case there was an opportunity to use it to give the Gospel.

It's the story of a lamb who didn't listen and got caught in a snowstorm and had to be rescued by the shepherd who lost his life in the process. After the first telling we realized a story about snow in a country that's in the 80's year around wasn't going to work well.

Fortunately she also took one about “The Little Red Hen.” A funny story- The first time we used it was in a church service during a week day that was filled with mostly children. we were prepared for a sermon but that wasn’t going to work so we quickly changed plans.

A Nicaraguan teenager named Carla, who had spent a year in the US was called upon to translate. She had never heard the story before and she thought Gallina Rojo (Red hen) was somebody’s name.

The story is about a fire on a farm and how the Red Hen gathers her chicks under her wings. One chick doesn’t listen and perishes in the fire. The farmer walks through afterwards and sees a smoldering mound. He kicks it over and little chicks run out. The mother gave her life like Christ gave his life to save us from judgment. The problem was Carla, along with telling a story about someone named “Red Hen” thought the farmer kicked over a mountain. Till all was said and done we’re not sure what the kids got out of the story. Fortunately we were able to go over it with her for the next time.

The thing about the story, once we got the translation corrected, was that the kids could identify with it. There aren’t many Americans left who have ever seen a hen gather her chicks under her wings, but in Nicaragua it was everyday life. Easy to relate to.

It was everyday life in Israel too. The hen gathers her chicks under her wings when she senses danger. There is nothing more powerful than a mother’s love - nothing except the love of God.

Warren Wiersbe writes: In this lament, Jesus was addressing the whole nation and not just the Pharisees who had tried to provoke Him. The people had been given many opportunities to repent and be saved, but they had refused to heed His call. “House” refers both to the family of Jacob (“the house of Israel”) and to the temple (“the house of God”), both of which would be “left desolate.” The city and the temple were destroyed and the people were scattered.

God judged them for rejecting His Son but even then His heart was open to them. Jesus suffered the cross at the hands of the Romans because the Jewish leaders pressured them. The agony of the cross was unbearable, but from that cross Jesus cried out, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”*

The heart of God is limitless, unbounded, inexhaustible.

That's why His message in the OT was *"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.*

God loved Israel with a special love but His invitation to come was open to everyone.

That's why His message in the NT didn't change: *And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*

The Doorway to Salvation is Narrow. The Heart of God is Immeasurably Wide

God extends His invitation of salvation and forgiveness to all. But God makes it clear that there is only one way to that forgiveness, and that's through His Son Jesus Christ.

Read 35b

In a few months from the time Jesus spoke these words some would say, *'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.* We call that event "The Triumphal entry." That's the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. But those people quickly turned against Him.

The real fulfillment is still future. The Prophet Zechariah looked forward to the day when the nations of the earth would surround Jerusalem with their armies.

The Jesus Christ will return and deliver the Nation. Zechariah writes: *And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*

The very existence of Israel today is just another proof of the accuracy of God's Word. Israel's house has been left desolate. Israel has no king or priest or temple or sacrifice. But Israel has God's promise of a future.

There will be peace one day. It will be the day the Prince of Peace sits on His throne in Jerusalem.

Are there few who are saved? We know this, the doorway to salvation is narrow. There's

one way and one way only. Jesus Christ came to suffer, and bleed, and die a gruesome death in our place. If there was another way His death was meaningless.

But we know this too; The heart of God is open wide. Whosoever will may come. Have you come in simple childlike faith believing that Jesus took your place? That Jesus took your punishment? Bore your sins in His own body on the tree?