

Entering God's Kingdom

Luke 13:22-30

SS Lesson for 07/22/2018

Devotional Scripture: Ps 1:1-6

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Luke 13:24

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS (LUKE 13:22-24)

Requirements that are being taught to all (22-23)

Teaching that is being obeyed (Rom 6:17-18)

Teaching that leads to contending for the faith (Jude 1:3)

Teaching that is being remembered (1 Cor 11:2)

Teaching by teachers who have been taught themselves (Rom 2:17-21)

Requirements cannot be fulfilled through human effort (23-24)

Human efforts cannot be relied upon, only God is trustworthy (2 Cor 1:9)

Human efforts cannot supply competence only through God (2 Cor 3:5)

Human weaknesses allow God's power to be relied upon (2 Cor 12:9)

Human wisdom should never be boasted only boast on knowing and relying on God (Jer 9:23-24)

Human efforts can lead to wickedness and reaps evil (Hos 10:13)

ENTRY DENIED (LUKE 13:25-28)

Denied to those who are not known by God (25-26)

Not known by God because of being evildoers (Matt 7:22-24)

Not known by God because of not being prepared when He calls (Matt 25:6-13)

Not known by God because of not obeying Him (Luke 6:46)

Not known by God because of unbelief (Heb 3:18-19)

Denied to those whose have not accepted Jesus (27-28)

Not accepting Jesus because of not entering the narrow gate (Matt 7:13-14)

Not accepting Jesus because of being ashamed of Him (Luke 9:26)

Not accepting Jesus because of unbelief (Rev 21:8)

Not accepting Jesus because of wickedness (Rev 22:15)

Not accepting Jesus because of not believing in the name of Jesus (John 3:18)

Not accepting Jesus because of not believing the testimony of God (1 John 5:10)

ENTRY FULFILLED (LUKE 13:29-30)

Fulfilled because all have opportunity (29)

Opportunity because God will dispatch His angels to gather His elect (Mark 13:27)

Opportunity because God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28)

Opportunity because the gospel is bearing fruit all over the world (Col 1:5-6)

Opportunity because the gospel will be proclaimed to every creature (Col 1:22-23)

Opportunity because God's Name will be great among the nations (Mal 1:11)

Fulfilled through God's purposes not human (30)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does according to His Will (Dan 4:35)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does whatever pleases Him (Ps 115:3)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does what He desires in heaven and on earth (Ps 135:6)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does what He intended and what He has planned (Isa 14:24)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God's plans stand firm forever (Ps 33:10-11)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God determines the outcome (Prov 16:9)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

The Few Who Are Being Saved (13:22-30)

The “Many” Are You, Not the “Few”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson guides us to understand what the Lord Jesus taught about **Entering God’s Kingdom**. The study’s aim is to realize that all our hope to enter into heaven ourselves hinges on our acceptance of God’s Word. The study’s application is to live, think, and believe in a way so as to enter into the kingdom of God.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Luke 13:24

Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

In this section Luke recorded Jesus’ teachings concerning who is and who is not a member of the kingdom. Throughout this section the theme of entering into the kingdom is often symbolized as taking part in a feast or banquet (13:29; 14:7-24; 15:23; 17:7-10). The kingdom was yet to come. Those who enter are those who respond positively to God by accepting the Messiah and His kingdom message.

13:22-30. Jesus taught that many from Israel will not be in **the kingdom** whereas many from outside Israel will be. **Someone asked** Jesus if **only a few people** were **going to be saved**. Apparently His followers were somewhat discouraged that His message of the kingdom was not sweeping the nation as they thought it would. They saw that Jesus continually met opposition as well as acceptance. Jesus’ teaching was clear—a person must accept what He was saying in order to enter the kingdom. To a Jewish mind salvation was related to the kingdom, that is, a person was saved in order to enter into God’s kingdom. Jesus responded to the person’s question with a story of a man who was giving a **feast** (symbolic of the kingdom, v. 29). After he closed **the door** to the banquet, no one else could come in for they were too late (v. 25). In fact, the host of the feast actually called them **evildoers** (v. 27). The latecomers responded that they had eaten and drunk with the host and that he had **taught in their streets** (v. 26), an obvious reference to Jesus’ ministry among the people of that generation. Jesus’ point in telling the story was that the people had to respond to His invitation at that time, for a time would come when it would be too late and they would not be allowed in the kingdom. Jesus spoke directly, telling the crowds that judgment would come on those who refused His message: **There will be weeping... and gnashing of teeth** and they will be **thrown out**, that is, not allowed to enter the kingdom. (On “weeping and gnashing of teeth” see Matt. 13:42.) But godly ones in the nation (represented by **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets**) will be **in the kingdom of God**. These remarks were revolutionary to Jesus’ hearers. Most of them assumed that because they were physically related to Abraham they would naturally enter into the promised kingdom. However, His next words were even more revolutionary—in fact devastating—to those who assumed that *only* the Jewish nation would be involved in the kingdom. Jesus explained that Gentiles would be added to the kingdom in place of Jewish people (Luke 13:29-30). **People** coming from the four corners of the world represent various population groups. Those listening to Jesus’ words should not have been surprised by this teaching because the prophets had often said the same thing. However, Jews in Jesus’ day believed that Gentiles were inferior to them. When Jesus had begun His ministry in Nazareth, His teaching of Gentile inclusion had so maddened the crowd that they tried to kill Him (4:13-30). The Jewish people considered themselves to be **first** in every way, but they would be **last**, that is, they would be left out of the kingdom. In contrast, some Gentiles, considered **last**, would be in the kingdom and would really be **first** in importance (13:30).

13:31-35 (Matt. 23:37-39). In response to a warning from **some Pharisees... Jesus** said that He had to reach **Jerusalem** because He was appointed to **die** there. There is debate concerning the Pharisees’ report about **Herod** wanting to **kill** Jesus. Throughout Luke, the Pharisees are presented in a negative light. Why would the Pharisees have wanted to protect Jesus in this instance? It seems best to understand the incident

as the Pharisees' pretext to get rid of Jesus. Jesus had publicly stated that His **goal** was to reach Jerusalem, and He was well on His way. Thus the Pharisees were apparently trying to deter Him from His task, to scare Him into setting aside His goal. Jesus' response, **Go tell that fox**, indicates that He saw the Pharisees as Herod's messengers who would report back to him. Jesus stated that He had a mission to perform (Luke 13:32). This Herod was Herod Antipas (see the chart on the Herods at 1:5). When Jesus said, **Today and tomorrow and the next day**, He was not saying that He would arrive in Jerusalem in three days. The point was that He had a mission in mind and that He would continue on the schedule He had set for Himself. The goal was Jerusalem where He would die. He must present Himself publicly to the religious authorities and then be put to death. It was at this point that Luke recorded the rejection of **Jerusalem** (representing the nation) by Jesus (13:34-35). Jesus lamented for the city and **longed to protect it as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings**, that is, tenderly and lovingly, even though the people **were not willing**. His entire ministry up to this point had been to offer the kingdom to the nation. But since the nation, which had even killed **the prophets**, had rejected His words, He would now reject them. Jesus stated, **Your house is left to you desolate** (*aphietai*, "abandoned"). "House" probably refers not to the temple, but to the whole city. Though He would continue to offer Himself as the Messiah, the die was now cast. The city was abandoned by the Messiah. Jesus noted (quoting Ps. 118:26) that the people of the city would **not see Him again** till they said that He was the Messiah. The crowd did quote this verse when Jesus entered the city in His Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:38), but their religious leaders disapproved. Ultimately this truth will be proclaimed when Jesus **comes** again and enters the city as the millennial Ruler.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

The words of today's text were spoken during the Lord's great teaching ministry. If you study His teaching ministry carefully, you can see that He touched on many subjects. But His chief concern was the need of salvation. The Lord Jesus was an evangelist first and foremost in His teaching and preaching. He was a soul-winner. This text is a rather stern, no-nonsense admonition to diligently seek the way of salvation. Jesus received a question one day about how many would be saved (Luke 13:23). Perhaps the answer given was not the answer that was expected. It is certainly an answer not very popular today, but it is the only answer that can be given. The Lord compared the way of salvation to a narrow gate. The word used here is the word from which we get "stenosis," a narrowing or constriction. It is hard to get in this gate. Jesus knew there were many "wide" gates that were more appealing to people (Matt. 7:13-14). The narrow gate is not as appealing and does not seem as inviting, but it is the one that must be found. There is only one gate of salvation, and that is by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. It is tempting to look for something broader than this, but Jesus said people must find this gate. Also, one must "strive" to enter it. Here the Lord was saying that there is often a struggle in entering the gate of salvation. As human beings grope for salvation, they struggle against their own flesh, which wants to do its own thing. They struggle against the world, which is filled with lies and deceit concerning salvation. They struggle against man-made religion, which often obscures the way of salvation. They struggle against the devil, who seeks to control and devour as many as he can. Yes, the gate of salvation can be difficult to enter. It is so difficult that the Lord used a term here that correlates to our English word "agony." It can be agonizing to watch someone who is lost and outside of salvation and struggling in life! Believers know what the right gate is. We may call out to others, but often it seems as if there are so many obstacles and so much confusion. The word "strive" is often used of athletic contests, like a wrestling match. No wonder some have referred to the preaching of the gospel as the great contest for souls. This narrow way does not mean that the way of salvation is tricky or complicated, but only that men and women must come to salvation God's way. He is just and merciful, but to be forgiven, it must be on His terms. Many struggle with this because they want salvation on their own terms. But salvation can only come according to the will of God (cf. Matt. 7:21). Our text is a stern warning. It reminds believers that sharing the gospel in this world will often not be easy. Lost people are struggling in the darkness to find the way and enter the gate. We need to remind them where the narrow gate is and how to enter it before they are shut out.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

An old joke tells of the man who, while touring through New York City, asked someone, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" The response: "Practice, practice, practice." Admittance into an exclusive organization or institution is not easy. One usually has to have a certain amount of money, friends, and/or special abilities for that to happen. Take, for example, the baseball Hall of Fame. Nomination to be counted part of such an elite

group must be earned. A player has to have the statistics to prove that he is worthy of belonging. Entrance into God's kingdom (the subject of today's study) is quite a different matter! There is no way we can earn admission. Our "statistics" are dismal; Romans 3:23 states that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We can never measure up on our own. To make it, we need help. In baseball terms, we needed a pinch hitter—someone to go to bat for us. That person is Jesus. He is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). But he has a caution for us in today's lesson, a caution we must heed.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Entry Requirements (Luke 13:22-24)

22 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.
23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them,
24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Requirements that are being taught to all (22-23)

Teaching that is being obeyed (Rom 6:17-18)

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Teaching that leads to contending for the faith (Jude 1:3)

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

Teaching that is being remembered (1 Cor 11:2)

2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

Teaching by teachers who have been taught themselves (Rom 2:17-21)

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?

Requirements cannot be fulfilled through human effort (23-24)

Human efforts cannot be relied upon, only God is trustworthy (2 Cor 1:9)

9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Human efforts cannot supply competence only through God (2 Cor 3:5)

5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

Human weaknesses allow God's power to be relied upon (2 Cor 12:9)

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Human wisdom should never be boasted only boast on knowing and relying on God (Jer 9:23-24)

23 This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord.

Human efforts can lead to wickedness and reaps evil (Hos 10:13)

13 But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors,

Entry Denied (Luke 13:25-28)

25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, 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 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

Denied to those who are not known by God (25-26)

Not known by God because of being evildoers (Matt 7:22-24)

22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Not known by God because of not being prepared when He calls (Matt 25:6-13)

6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 9 "No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' 12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

Not known by God because of not obeying Him (Luke 6:46)

46 "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Not known by God because of unbelief (Heb 3:18-19)

18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Denied to those whose have not accepted Jesus (27-28)

Not accepting Jesus because of not entering the narrow gate (Matt 7:13-14)

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Not accepting Jesus because of being ashamed of Him (Luke 9:26)

26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Not accepting Jesus because of unbelief (Rev 21:8)

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Not accepting Jesus because of wickedness (Rev 22:15)

15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Not accepting Jesus because of not believing in the name of Jesus (John 3:18)

18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Not accepting Jesus because of not believing the testimony of God (1 John 5:10)

10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

Entry Fulfilled (Luke 13:29-30)

29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.
30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

Fulfilled because all have opportunity (29)

Opportunity because God will dispatch His angels to gather His elect (Mark 13:27)

27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Opportunity because God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28)

28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

Opportunity because the gospel is bearing fruit all over the world (Col 1:5-6)

5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Opportunity because the gospel will be proclaimed to every creature (Col 1:22-23)

22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Opportunity because God's Name will be great among the nations (Mal 1:11)

11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty.

Fulfilled through God's purposes not human (30)

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does according to His Will (Dan 4:35)

35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does whatever pleases Him (Ps 115:3)

3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does what He desires in heaven and on earth (Ps 135:6)

6 The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God does what He intended and what He has planned (Isa 14:24)

24 The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God's plans stand firm forever (Ps 33:10-11)

10 The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. 11 But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

God's purposes cannot be stopped because God determines the outcome (Prov 16:9)

9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Few Who Are Being Saved (13:22-30)

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 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!' "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" (Luke 13:22-30).

In verse 22 Luke introduces this section with the statement that Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem, teaching as He journeyed. This is not the first time such a statement has been made, for previously Luke wrote:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village. After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go (Luke 9:51–10:1).

Luke's reference to Jerusalem is not incidental, and surely not accidental. Luke, as one of my friends has observed, "is a very geographically oriented writer." Here in Luke we find the ministry of our Lord pressing toward Jerusalem. In Luke's second volume (Acts), we find the ministry of our Lord (through the apostles and the church), pressing from Jerusalem to the "uttermost part of the earth" (cf. Acts 1:8, which may well serve as a kind of geographical outline to the book of Acts).

I understand from these earlier words of Luke that Jesus is continuing to press on towards Jerusalem, and that He is visiting those villages and towns to which He had previously sent His disciples. Our Lord and His message should not come as something new to these people and places.

Somewhere along the way, a man in the crowd put a question to Jesus, which was,

"Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (verse 23).

Luke seems to deliberately avoid telling us who the man was, what group he may have represented, or what his motive might have been for asking the question. Whatever the man's motive, the question provided Jesus with the occasion to teach His audience an important lesson.

The question which this unnamed individual put to Jesus raises some questions in the minds of the reader. I find it essential to ask three questions pertaining to our text.

QUESTION ONE: WERE THERE ONLY A FEW PEOPLE WHO WERE BEING SAVED?

Jesus did not answer the man's question directly, but I believe that the answer is clear by inference. Jesus, in speaking of the "**narrow door**," does suggest that the answer to the man's question was that only a few would be saved. In a parallel text, Jesus speaks of the "narrow way," which has virtually the same meaning, but here it is clearly stated:

"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" (Matthew 7:13-14).

It is not how few who are saved that will shock this crowd, but who many of these "few" are. This matter will be taken up shortly. For now, however, let us be sure that we understand what Jesus means when He says,

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke 13:24).

Let us seek to do this by asking several questions, and seeking to learn the answer from our text.

QUESTION TWO: IS JESUS SPEAKING OF SALVATION AS THAT FOR WHICH ONE SHOULD STRIVE TO ENTER INTO?

I believe that the answer to this question is clearly yes. The man asked if only a few were to be saved. His question was speaking of salvation. When John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Messiah, He referred to the prophecy of Isaiah, which spoke of Israel's "salvation" (Luke 3:6, citing Isaiah 40:5). In the mind of the Israelite, 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 the kingdom of God. Jesus went on to say that those who did not enter by the narrow door would be outside the kingdom, looking in with weeping and gnashing of teeth (cf. Luke 13:24-30). The "narrow door," as I understand this text, is our Lord Jesus, who is the only means of eternal salvation, the only way of entering into the kingdom of God.

QUESTION THREE: IS JESUS SAYING THAT ONE MUST WORK HARD TO ENTER INTO SALVATION?

Simply stated, I believe the answer to this question is yes. I believe that nearly the same thing is said in the book of Hebrews, where the author writes,

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11, NASB).

But how can this be? How can it be said that one must strive to enter into the kingdom of God? A few observations from our passage will help us find the answer.

(1) Jesus is speaking to Israelites. His words are directed toward Israel. The question is raised by one man, but the answer of our Lord is directed toward a broader group ("them," v. 23). The term "you" is frequently found in verses 24-28, and the context makes it evident that the "you" is Israel. The words of our Lord in this text, then, are spoken to the Israelites.

(2) The expression "make every effort" ("strive," NASB) is the rendering of an athletic term, used to speak of competition in the athletic games. We might think of it as an Olympic kind of expression. We have seen much "striving" these past two weeks, much effort expended. The same expression can also refer to doing battle, to fighting an opponent. Either way "striving" means not only entering into a struggle or competition, but also winning or losing.

(3) One is to strive to enter a particular door.

(4) The door through which the Israelites were urged to pass was one through which they had not yet passed. This seems self-evident, almost trivial, and yet it is a vital point to recognize. I believe that it never

entered the man's mind who asked the question that he was not viewed as one who was "in" the kingdom. To the Israelites, they were already on the inside, and a few Gentiles could also get "in" by becoming a Jew, by submitting to proselyte baptism and by keeping the law. How shocking Jesus' words must have been to those who heard Him.

(5) The door which one is to strive to enter is Christ Himself. He is the door, the only way into the kingdom of God. He is the King and it is only by receiving Him that one will enter the kingdom.

(6) The door that one is to strive to enter is narrow. The "narrowness" of the door suggests several important lessons. If the door is narrow, then few will pass through it. If the door is narrow, then it must be passed through one-at-a-time. The Israelites believed that since they were descendants of Abraham they were assured a place in the kingdom, something which John the Baptist strongly refuted (Luke 3:7-8). Since the door was narrow which led to salvation, and the gate was broad leading to destruction, one would certainly not haphazardly enter into the kingdom of God; one would have to strive to enter in. Just as one who is in the rapidly moving current has to strive to swim upstream, so the Israelite had to strive to enter into the kingdom, contrary to the mainstream of Israelites.

(7) The door through which the Israelites were urged to pass was soon to close. It is not the narrowness of the door which will pose a problem to the Israelites, but the "closedness" of the door. It matters not how wide a door is when it is closed. The door is, at the time of Jesus' words, open, but narrow. The door will soon be closed. While time is running out for our Lord, it is likewise running out for Israel. They must act, and act quickly.

(8) The door which the Israelites do not pass, is one which they will, in the future, wish to pass, but not be able. This is a final offer, as it were, one which would not last for long. Jesus taught that there would be a time when the Israelites would wish to enter the door, but would not be able to do so. It is one thing to be barred by a door that one never wishes to pass through; it is vastly differently to wish to pass through a door and to find it permanently closed.

The question which was asked afforded Jesus one more time to underscore the same message which has marked this phase of His ministry: the time for Israel to repent and to receive Him as Savior is short. Israel is to strive to enter in through the narrow door, not because men must work for their salvation, but because the time for Israel is short. There is much to be gained or lost. Israel dare not be apathetic, passive, nor even philosophical about Jesus and His ministry, as the question of the man in the crowd seems to suggest. The time is short. Israel must pursue salvation as something which is to be gained or lost in the person of Christ. Salvation is not gained by works, for it is free, it is the result of the sacrificial death of Christ. But this free gift is to be diligently sought for the prize it is.

Let me attempt to illustrate what I believe Jesus to be saying. This week Steve Green will be putting on a free concert at Dallas seminary. There is no charge for the tickets. Seminary students and others must contact the seminary missions office to procure tickets. If enough seminarians do not acquire tickets, others may have them. If one values Steve's singing, one will work hard to get concert tickets, even though they are free. There is only a short time in which they may be acquired, and diligent effort (striving, if you would) is thus needed.

So it is with salvation. The gift is free. Man does not work for righteousness, so that he can be good enough to get in. Neither does any person have some kind of automatic membership in God's kingdom. Those who are to be in the kingdom must recognize both the value of this gift and the need to diligently strive to enter into the marvelous blessings it offers. The urgency of the issue, the greatness of the reward, and the shortness of the time all necessitate a purposed, diligent seeking of that kingdom, and of getting through that narrow door, so as to receive the free Gift of salvation.

The "Many" Are You, Not the "Few"

The man who put the question to Jesus seems to have assumed that he was among the "few" who were being saved. He may, like his fellow Israelites, have thought that the "few" being saved were Israelites, while the "many" who were not were Gentiles. Jesus has some very distressing words for those who would think such thoughts. In verses 24-30 He is going to show His audience that Israelites will not be prominent among the "few" who are being saved.

Jesus first shocked His listeners by indicating that they were not already on the inside, so far as the kingdom is concerned. Then, He went on to say that many of His fellow-Israelites who were not on the inside would not ever be in the kingdom. He tells them in symbolic terms that God will tell His people, Israel, that He does not even know where they are from. Twice, in fact, this is stated.

It is not coincidental that Jesus chose to use the words of David in Psalm 6:8 to express God's rejection of Israelites after time for entering the door is past.

"Depart from Me, all you evildoers" (Luke 13:27).

In this psalm, David begins with a petition for God to save him (vss. 1-5). He then described his own suffering, which included (and may have been initiated by) the rejection and resistance of his adversaries (cf. Psalm 6:7b). The last three verses of this psalm (vv. 8-10) conclude the psalm with an expression of confidence that God has heard his petition and will save him. The beginning of this final section is verse 8, and the very words which our Lord spoke. I believe that Jesus is likening His rejection as Israel's Messiah-King by His people Israel to David's rejection as Israel's king by his fellow Israelites. David's rejection is thus typical of our Lord's, and David's words of confidence, spoken to his enemies, can thus be repeated by Israel's Messiah as well.

How sad is Israel's response to God's rejection of them from His kingdom. Note their defense, the basis on which they feel they should be included in the kingdom:

"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets'" (Luke 13:26).

They believe that mere **association** with Jesus was sufficient to save them. They had eaten in His presence. He had taught in their streets. Wasn't this enough? No. John the Baptist, followed by Jesus, required the followers of Jesus—those who would be truly be saved—to identify with Him. This is what baptism was all about. Did the Israelites think that being a Jew saved him? He was wrong. Baptism was a public testimony of the Jew's break with His culture, and with the legalism and ritualism of Judaism. It was a profession of identifying with Jesus as the Messiah. **Identification** with Jesus was, to put it in the terms Jesus is using in our text, passing through the narrow door.

May I pause for a moment here to press this point a little more personally? How many people think that they are going to be in God's kingdom because they are a part of some religious sect or denomination? How many suppose they are saved because they come from a Christian family? How many think that they are saved by mere association with spiritual things? Nothing could be further from the truth. You are only saved by identification with Christ. Association with Christ (by going to church, reading the Bible, or whatever) isn't enough. It wasn't for the Jews of Jesus' day. It isn't enough for you either.

But the final blow of this paragraph is yet to come. Not only is association with Israel or with Jesus not enough. Not only are many Israelites not going to be among the "few" who are saved. But many of those who are saved will be Gentiles, and not Jews. This is made crystal clear in verses 28-30:

"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

Many Israelites, who assume they had a reserved seat in the kingdom of God, will find themselves on the outside when the kingdom comes. Many Gentiles, whom the Jews believed would suffer eternal torment, and whom they felt were unworthy of salvation (cf. the Old Testament book of Jonah), are described by Jesus as sitting at the banquet table of the kingdom, along with the prophets and the patriarchs of Israel.

Notice that the Israelites who miss out on the kingdom by failing to pass through the narrow gate are very conscious of what they have lost, and what others have gained. This is the basis for great torment, for "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hell is no joy. Hell is being separated from God, and wishing you were not. Hell is being separated from God, knowing that you could not have been, but refused, and watching others enjoy it. Hell includes conscious torment, the knowledge of what could have been.

In the Old Testament, God's covenant with Abraham included the blessing of the Gentiles (cf. Genesis 12:1-3). The Old Testament prophets also spoke of the blessing of the Gentiles. Jesus spoke of this as well, and it sent His audience into a frenzy of opposition (Luke 4:16-30). Many who are first—Jews in the minds of an Israelite—Jesus said, will be last, left out, while many Gentiles—those considered "last" by Jews—will be first, enjoying the blessings of God in the kingdom (Luke 13:30).

Before we pass on to the second, and final, paragraph of our text, let me say that we dare not be philosophical about the kingdom of God, as the man with the "academic" question seems to have been. Jesus would have us know that entrance into the kingdom is something which we all need, something which we all must do individually, and something which is so urgent we dare not put the matter off or deal casually with it. The

kingdom of God—salvation if you prefer—is a blessing so great, a gift so free, but with an offer so limited in time, that we must diligently pursue it.

But how, you might ask, can unsaved men be expected, even required, to pursue salvation with such energy, such zeal? Apart from a grasp of the gospel, apart from a knowledge of one's lost condition, apart from a realization of the urgency of the issue, one will not take the matter so seriously. But this is something which the Holy Spirit produces. Jesus told His disciples in the 16th chapter of John's gospel that it was the Holy Spirit who would communicate, convince, and convict men pertaining to sin, righteousness, and judgment. And when He does His work, men get on the move. A look at the second chapter of Acts tells us how powerful His persuasion is.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/47-striving-enter-narrow-door-luke-1322-35>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

“Nice guys finish last” is an oft-used expression. But after considering Jesus' teaching in today's text, the saying could be reversed (and also modified) to read “Last people finish nice [first].” This illustrates Jesus' promise of a reversal of the way that the world often views people and situations. The first/last reversal further illustrates the extent to which Jesus' kingdom is, as he told Pilate, “not of this world” (John 18:36). Those considered movers-and-shakers or headliners in the world's estimation do not carry such weight in the eyes of God. He is looking for those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty, the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3), those who know they can never earn a place in the kingdom of God and do not have a sense of entitlement. Consider what happened to the prodigal son in Jesus' classic parable. This young man arrogantly took his father's wealth and wasted it, then found himself in such desperate straits that he was relegated to feeding pigs. When he “came to his senses” (Luke 15:17), he determined that he would return to his father and prepared what was a very humbling speech. To the son's amazement, the father welcomed him with open arms and spared no expense in showing mercy. Here is the irony: when the son thought he was of no further value to his father (or last in his father's eyes), that is when he was truly ready to go home. And his father gave him first-class treatment, much to the chagrin of his older brother (who represents the haughty teachers of the law and Pharisees and their disdainful attitude toward the “last” in society). Jesus' words also have application to the work of the local congregation. Sometimes those who are more visible or vocal or up front receive the greatest attention or adulation from others. And those serving in more isolated areas (especially in more remote foreign fields) may never be appreciated here on earth for the degree of sacrifice they make for the kingdom. However, such individuals will never be overlooked by the heavenly Father. He sees what is done “in secret” (as Jesus taught, Matthew 6:4), and those who have served in seemingly minor roles will receive an abundant reward from the Father. Nobody, whether good or evil, goes under the radar with him. Churches and individual Christians should evaluate their ministries to the “last” in their communities. How such ministries manifest themselves can vary depending on the location, need, resources, etc. But each of us probably has some of the “last” in our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces—people who are used to being overlooked, scorned, or ridiculed. What can we do to be salt and light to those individuals, to treat them as “first” for a change?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Sharing the gospel may require us to leave our comfort zones (Luke 13:22)
2. We cannot enter the kingdom of God by working hard or doing good deeds (vss. 23-24)
3. We must be careful to follow God's commands as outlined in the Bible (vs. 25)
4. Having an acquaintanceship with God is simply not enough (vss. 26-27)
5. Some people will be surprised or angry to learn that they will not enter heaven (vss. 28-29)
6. God's kingdom works completely different from the world's system (vs. 30)