

Luke 13/22-35: THE NARROW DOOR

[The Ultimate Man and Destination]

v22 **Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.**

The latest (last?) of Luke's summary descriptions of Jesus' ministry – both the what and the where.

Jesus began a tour of ministry in Judea, centred on Jerusalem, in 19/11: this may not be his final approach to the city (cf. 17/11, 18/31, 19/11).

v23 **Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"**

We do not know who this was. More intriguing is why they asked it. Were they a religious person who hoped to be part of the exclusive 'few'? Was it a person who thought he discerned in the hard-heartedness of men, and/or in the challenging nature of some of Jesus' teaching, the likely outcome that many people would reject him (despite his popularity now)? Did he suspect this from OT precedent? It is suggestive that the question was not, "Lord, are many people going to be saved?" – nothing seemed to indicate that.

It must be noted that Jesus did not give a direct answer to the question, a 'yes' or 'no' (so it would be unwise for us to do so). Rather, as was his wont, he answered with a parable (v24-27). Although the 'narrow door' analogy *seems* to imply a 'yes' answer (and Jesus doesn't directly correct his questioner), this does not amount to a simple 'yes'. Indeed, Jesus says only that "many...will try to enter and will not be able to" and not that many will not be saved. (That is, it does not follow from this that "only a few" will be saved rather than many.) His point is that each of us should take responsibility for our own salvation rather than being concerned about everyone else's (how many and what percentage of men will be saved). Each of us must make the effort to ensure we are inside and so not be amongst those surprised (as many will be) to find themselves on the outside.

He said to them, [v24] "Make every effort

The NT will use this expression 9x [+3] in connection with the outworking of salvation (of Christian life and ministry), but here Jesus uses it with reference to our finding salvation. This is not in any way a contradiction of the NT's assertion that we are saved by grace through faith rather than through our works or effort. It means rather that we may need to search diligently and tirelessly, far and wide, and for a long period of time, sifting through many options and testing many claims, before we find the true path and entrust ourselves to it.

to enter through the narrow door

The door to what? To salvation (v23), the kingdom (v28f), heaven.

Salvation's / the kingdom's door is narrow because of fact/truth/reality, not 'narrow-mindedness': there is only one way (Jn 14/6). Open-mindedness can be a good quality in many areas of life (where there are genuinely several perspectives) but generally open-mindedness is overrated; where it conflicts with truth/reality, it is fatal (cf. single cure for specific disease). Open-mindedness is one of the gods of our age (together with its brother, tolerance, and father, relativism) and narrow-mindedness a pejorative term; but truth by definition is exclusive.

because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.

v25 speaks of those who try to enter too late; v24 (here) of those who try to enter using the wrong doors (i.e. on their own terms rather than God's) – e.g.: our 'good' lives and deeds (our own 'righteousness'); the 'essential goodness' of our humanity; other, man-made religions. As much as these doors may seem to us to be wide, legitimate points of entry, they are in fact bricked-up.

v25 **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.'**

This tells us, firstly, that there *will* come a time when the owner of the 'kingdom', God, closes the door! This is a theme throughout the Bible. Seek the Lord while he may be found. There *will* come a time when it's too late. After that, not any amount of pleading will change God's sovereign will (for all that God is love, grace, mercy). "Outside" is a common metaphor for hell (e.g. Mw 25/30). There will never in all eternity be a change to inside.

But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you've come from.'

God's reason is he doesn't know us (there is no relationship, no personal acquaintance) and thus 'doesn't know' where we've come from (our 'origins', who we belong to, why we're there, what's in our heart – our motive).

v26 **Then you will say, We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'**

It is noteworthy that those shut out are surprised: they thought they would be inside (had qualified for entry). The arguments they advance include: "we ate and drank with you" – i.e. we associated with you and your disciples, we hung around you, we went to church, we rubbed shoulders with Christians; and "you taught in our streets" – i.e. we know of/about you, we heard you preach, we heard the gospel, we thought you and your message were quite nice, we had nothing against you. In other words, they hoped for salvation by association or salvation by exposure. Other arguments people may advance are those already listed: their good life and deeds; the 'essential goodness' of their humanity; their sincere pursuit and worship of 'god' in another religion.

v27 **But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you've come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'**

Despite all these arguments, God's response and reasoning remain exactly the same.

In fact, he calls them 'evildoers' (which sounds harsh until we remember that all men are sinners unless and until they believe on Christ and receive his righteousness: Ro 3/9-26) and he banishes them from his presence. Even our righteous acts are filthy rags (Is 64/6) and the proud presumption that we can save ourselves is an evil.

v28 **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.**

Jesus has finished the parable, and here makes it clear that it dealt with spiritual, eternal realities.

"Weeping...gnashing of teeth" v "thrown out" are also standard references to hell (cf. Mw 25/30).

Note the continuity between OT and NT, of OC and NC salvation.

v29 **People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.**

Those shut out (and we) would have expected to see the patriarchs and prophets in the kingdom (v28) but now Jesus says many other people from all directions (every nation on the earth) will take their places (they not only qualify for admission but have reserved places) at the feast (a common element of kingdom promise).

v30 **Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.**

Some of these people those shut out (and maybe us too) would have considered the last/least likely to be there: Gentiles (v Jews); 'sinners' (v the religious and outwardly righteous); people different to us (by race, culture, gender or the infinite variety of preferences and prejudices we impose on others and use to 'measure' them).

Conversely, those they (we) thought would be first to be there (themselves) will be last (not there).

But note "there are those who...": not all, but some (some 'firsts' will enter, some 'lasts' will not).

Jesus is stirring his hearers (and us) to godly jealousy (cf. Ro 11/13-14).

Gospel: Jesus – the narrow door (v24).

The whole passage is really a salvation message (who and how [v how many]), and the verdict for believers is the same as for unbelievers present: forget the fractions – make sure *you* enter (or have entered) the kingdom through the door of Jesus so you are not surprised to find yourselves shut out but can take your places inside.

In this format, this passage is unique to Luke, but parallels of two parts of it are found in Mw 7/13-14&21-23.

v13-14: Here Jesus implies more clearly that "many" will be destroyed and "only a few" saved.

This could be taken as a literal, straightforward 'measurement' (and we could lodge no objection against God's sovereignty, wisdom or mercy if it is to be read thus). But it could also be read as another attempt by Jesus to provoke his hearers into thought and action (especially given that members of Israel could be complacent):

don't assume your salvation (just because you belong to Israel) but make sure you find and enter the right gate.

A third angle is that Jesus is employing hyperbole to emphasize how easy it is (because of the flesh, the world and the devil) to land up on and walk along the wrong path; and how the right path can only be found and stayed on by intentional and careful seeking and choosing (cf. Pr 14/12, 16/25).

v21-23: Not those who claim to have a relationship with Jesus (how easy it is to say the right words), not even those who perform miracles, but only those who do the will of God, will enter the kingdom. This does not contradict salvation by grace through faith (v works), because obedience is the evidence of both faith (Ja 2/14-18,22,26) and love (Jn 14/15,21,23) – real rel. Our fruit will prove our repentance and faith (v15-20 cf. Lk 3/8).