

## Words that Cut the Heart 2) "Are Only A Few Saved?"

Luke 13:22-30 • 2025-08-24 • Series: Words that Cut the Heart



The young child at the amusement park approaches the line for a ride he and all the other kids have picked out. But there's a problem. One of them failed to check the "you must be this tall" sign at the start of the line. After waiting several minutes to finally give their ticket and get on the ride that shortcoming finally catches up. One by one the other children enter the ride through the gate. But the attendant sees one child who appears too short. He grabs the measuring stick and evaluates the situation. "Sorry, you're not tall enough for this ride." The frustration, pain, and embarrassment of such rejection is multiplied by the fact he is missing out while others enter. And it can happen the other way around too. Once all my littlest children were gearing up to join a ride for small children. One of their siblings wanted to join. But when he tried to enter, he was told, "Sorry, you're too tall for this ride." I don't think he'd ever heard that before or thought he'd ever be disappointed to hear someone say, "you're too big or too tall." But he was. And I think the saddest part was he knew he'd never be short enough again to enter. He was shut out from that ride. It can be devastating when you see others gaining entrance somewhere, but you are denied. No matter how many tickets the gate is shut. No matter how hard you try, you won't be able to enter.

What about the gate to heaven? Today we continue our look at warnings given to us by Jesus, words which cut the heart. As we read from Luke 13 we find out something admittance into the kingdom of God.

Jesus is going from town to town in Judea teaching and preaching and someone asked him a very basic question about heaven: "Are only a few going to be saved?" Do you ever wonder about this? Perhaps he looked at the number of people living godly lives and reasoned they were few. Perhaps he compared the Jewish people to the vast empires around them and reasoned they were only a few. He knew one truth: saving was needed. He knew that God is holy. He does not tolerate wickedness and sin. He knew that the devil was condemned and along with him all sinners. He knew admittance to God's kingdom was not an open ticket for all.

To answer his question Jesus begins by saying the way is indeed narrow. "Strive to enter through the narrow gate." The way to heaven is not broad. Not everyone sees heaven in such a light. There is a movie that came out years ago which involved a man from India describing something which happened to him as a youth. The movie begins by presenting this man's view of religion. His nickname is Pie, and he decided at a young age that he needed to learn and try every religion. Like a sponge he chooses to follow many faiths. He does this by observing all of them at the same time. To the frustration of his father, Pie is both Hindu and Buddhist. He follows the tenets of Islam yet also follows the religion of his Hindu culture. In all this Pie sees no conflict. His father is a humanist who denies religion, while he is a polytheistic-monotheistic-spiritual-choose your favorite flavor of religion of the moment. The young man eventually runs across a Christian minister. Pie decides that Jesus is intriguing. So, he includes Jesus in his list of spiritual musings. The whole movie goes on to present him telling an incredible survival story as his ship sinks at sea. He survives and must convince the authorities that he is telling them the truth. They struggle to believe his story and want the true version. Without spoiling the movie too much, it basically concludes with, "you chose which story you think is best." That's what Pie did with religion. That's what the movie writers want you to do too. But Jesus doesn't allow for such an approach. The way to heaven is a narrow gate.

In fact, Jesus says, "Many, I tell you, will try to enter, but will not be able to." Are only a few saved? Here's part of the answer. And the problem isn't that people don't try to enter heaven. Yes, there are many who don't seem to care about it. There are many who have no plans for eternity or seek spiritual truth. But there are also countless many who continue to attempt it. That is why you see so many religions like the young man from India found. Everyone seems to have their take on the best way to enter paradise. You have the five tenets of Islam, the book of doctrines and covenants of the church of the LDS, you have the three treasures of Taoism, the good karma, devotion, or self-meditation which billions adhere to are all attempts at some kind of higher level -- heaven, or a better existence. There is no lack of trying! But "many will try to enter and will not be able to." And note that Jesus includes his Jewish listeners here too. He doesn't say, "many gentiles." He says to those who have had the Old Testament Scriptures read to them for centuries.

What will happen? "Once the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open for us!'" The terrible feeling of being shut out will happen to many on the last day. The door will shut when Christ has returned and completed the judgment. All the dead will be raised. And on that day, there will be many left outside in shock. They will even call on the name of the Lord saying, "Open for us."

And those who knew God's name and even called on him in prayer will hear the awful reply, "I don't know where you come from." And in a desperate cry those who tried to enter into heaven and are shut out on judgment day will clamor, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets."

Dare we ever believe this is enough to be saved? "Salvation by association" you might call it. Notice those shut out don't say "you taught us" as if they were disciples of Jesus. No, it was good enough that they were familiar with Jesus. He taught in their community. You cannot enter the narrow gate to heaven simply because you knew the pastor or because

your mom taught Sunday School at church. It isn't enough to say, "I got confirmed when I was a kid," or "I read through the Bible once." Being familiar with Jesus doesn't make you saved. Having a familiarity with Jesus so close that they even dined with him wasn't enough for the Jews in ancient Judea. Having your name on the register of a church membership role or your confirmation certificate on the wall isn't going to work for you either. When the gate is shut it is shut.

Those shut out of God's kingdom will hear him answer their pleas, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me you evildoers." Evil doers? Are those who follow the philosophy of love and kindness, are those who work and try as hard as they can to be good people evil doers? God says, "away from me" as he sends them to the same torment of the devil and his angels. No amount of good can atone for the evil they carry under the curse of sin. Salvation by our own works will fail us. We will not be able to enter. Salvation by mere association with Christ will not be enough.

And so many attempt to enter the narrow gate by their own efforts. But so many fail at this. Have you ever worked on a building project? Have you ever made a mistake when working on a large-scale project? You take your level and find that your building is off. You can't make a building by haphazardly eying up things. They must be in line, or you will run into many problems. If a wall is not level, a line is not straight, the whole building will show it. Being off by just a single degree can translate to being off by a great distance on the other end. God's requirements are that our bodies be perfect and holy temples. Sin is something perverted and corrupt. It is an imperfection which defies God's holy will. You make one small sin, and it corrupts the whole body. It doesn't matter if all the other things you do are as straight as an arrow: one mistake and you are flawed and sinful. Some people try to follow every rule and guide method or mindset to make themselves fit for heaven. But there is another even more pressing problem. Even if it were possible to make all your cuts precise and your measurements true, even if you could make all things straight and perfect in your building, it won't do any good if your building supplies are bad. A crooked and warped board makes a crooked beam. A broken screw makes a bad joint. Poorly mixed concrete makes a cracked or brittle foundation. You get the idea. That's the way it is with us. Our building materials are corrupt too. Not only do we sin and forfeit God's kingdom. We are of sin-ridden material. This sin is the one we are born with. Along with all our evil deeds it shuts us out of the kingdom of God.

Finally, the frustration of being sent away from God will be compounded as you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets of God on the inside enjoying the feast of heaven. For an ancient Jew this would be especially hard to swallow. Weren't they going to be blessed along with Abraham and his sons? How did they enter the narrow gate? What good did they do to enter? What secret route did they find and how did they pass in?

They didn't. They abandoned the way many take and took the narrow one: Christ. They knew of the perfection which God requires. True righteousness and holiness is required to be in his holy city. How did Abraham, and Isaac, and the prophets of God get through? That's just it. The Scriptures declare how. These people all were saved and entered the narrow gate. Christianity is not some new doctrine or teaching. It is one which God revealed throughout history and through the prophets. It is narrow because it is not by works. It is through repentance and faith. And it is by God's grace.

And the beauty grace gives us the complete answer to the questions, "Are only a few going to be saved." Many unexpectedly will be saved. "People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The way is narrow because it is by grace and faith in Christ. But many will be saved by grace.

As Jesus' listeners looked around they must have been shocked. Surely the Jews would all be saved? Surely those who knew Jesus. Jesus turns it around. Who are the many that will be saved? The non-Jews will find an open gate. They will pass into paradise. The sad irony is what concludes Jesus' warning "Listen! Those who are first will be last and the last will be first." Those who thought they had done right by God will find they had spurned their God's grace in Christ. Those who the world views as nice and good and deserving of paradise will be shut out of it. And those who the world considers a lost cause, the sinner, the one who lays out and confesses: "Surely I was sinful at birth; I have sinned against you, Lord." And the one who believes he or she has no right, no ability, no claim of his own to enter heaven, that one will be justified before God and enjoy heaven. "The last will be first."

Are you going to be saved? It'd be easy to say, "I belong to a conservative Christian church. My congregation is part of a conservative Evangelical Lutheran synod, the WELS." Don't let that become a false hope based on mere association. Repent, believe, hold onto his Word in faith. Jesus warns against the attitude which views heaven so broadly open that admittance comes by association. He also warns that we not look to ourselves as the few who have access because, unlike the rest of this world, we live holier, god-pleasing lives. He warns that that will not serve us either. Rather we strive to remain strong against the assaults on our soul which would seek to pull us from grace. Strive to keep your eyes on Jesus as the only way through the narrow gate. Strive to push aside every temptation to think discipleship comes by mere membership or that obedience to the law is the way to salvation instead of Christ.

When the door is shut, the Scripture will be fully fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." And when you sit with the prophets of God and the many from all corners of this world, it will be when God greets you who entered the narrow gate, the gate which was opened by grace, the gate which you entered through faith.