

STRAIT GATE, PART 4

We have been taking up a very important passage of scripture that has to do with entering Heaven, Luke 13: 23-24;

“Someone asked him “Lord, are only a few 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.”

So the man comes and stands in front of Jesus, and looks up into the face of our Lord and speaks what is in his heart: “Is it true, Master, that only a few shall be saved?” Jesus does not answer the theoretical question, for that would do no good, and would be certainly misunderstood.

But Jesus points out to all, how they can decide the question for themselves; Jesus makes plain the conditions which determine the answer. Jesus says, “You must strive to enter in.” The Greek word is “agonize,” a word descriptive of the intensity of the contests in the Greek games, where the athletes strove even to death.

Any one who has watched the games between the college or professional teams in football, or in hockey or soccer, sees something of the intensity of the struggle. But why must we strive? First, because the way is by the STRAIT, that is the “narrow”.

It is the strait gate or door to all that is best in life, to the kingdom of God on earth, and in Heaven. Note that Jesus did not MAKE the way narrow; He only STATED THE FACT, and used it as a motive. The gate is as wide as the Love of God can make it.

A gate is made to enter by, not to keep men out. It is a standing invitation to enter. A fence is to keep men out, a gate is to let them in. When we read in the book of Revelation we find that the City of God is pictured with 12 gates, 3 on each side, to express the wide welcome from every direction, for every race and nation and condition.

These gates are never shut, but each one of these gates is so narrow that only the pure and holy may enter, Rev. 21:7: “But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” And each one who enters must be so, or the city would not be the City of God.

Secondly, the gate is strait, and the narrowness of the gate is a necessary fact. The gate to every treasure must be narrow; as the gate to knowledge, to success, to wisdom, to courage, to culture. If you wish to go to the north star, there is only one direction north, and a million directions away from it.

The gate to joining a choir is narrow. That is, no one can really enter it without learning to sing, no matter how many other things he may do. There is one right, and a thousand wrong ways.

There is one way to be a Christian, and many ways to go astray. A wider way to Heaven means a poorer Heaven. A wider way to virtue means a weaker virtue or none.

So the man asks Jesus, "Lord, are only a few men to be saved?" And Jesus told them: "You must do your utmost to get in through the narrow door, for many, I assure you, will try to do so and will not succeed!" Many will seek to enter in and shall not be able, because they are not willing to fulfill the conditions, and pay the cost.

Some will not be able to enter because it will be TOO LATE! For verse 25 tells of the master of the house shutting the door, finally and forever! They were left out, NOT SAVED. They had refused the invitation, and to comply with the conditions, until there was no hope of a change of character and of life.

But there is yet another place in which Jesus speaks of the "strait" or the narrow gate, that is in Matthew 7:13,14; "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." Jesus here explains that entering into the kingdom is like a man going through a narrow gate, in contrast to going thru the gate which is wide and broad, and leads to destruction.

Jesus gave no assurance that the majority will enter the kingdom. He declares that few find the gate leading to life and righteousness. There have been many attempts to soften this hard fact, to deny that few are saved, and many religious teachers and believers, INSIST that all men will eventually be reconciled to God.

There is no justification for ignoring these plain words of Christ. They way is indeed narrow, and only one Savior is offered the world, Acts: 4:12; "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved." So Jesus tells the people, "The gate is wide and the way is broad, that leads to destruction."

This is the way of self-will, of disobedience to God's Word. All those who refuse to own and admit their guilt and their needy condition, and who ignore the claims of Christ, are on the broad way. The evil and sinful way is entered by a wide gate, for all men naturally choose this road.

But Jesus says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way...unto life." There is no real life apart from the knowledge of Christ, 1st John 5:12: "He who has the Son has life, he who has not the Son has not life." It is as we yield our wills to the Will of the Lord, and we surrender completely and fully to Him, that we enter the strait gate and pass into the narrow way.

This leads to life, life in its richest, fullest sense to be embraced in measure here on earth, but enjoyed in all its fullness in a most blessed Eternity with the Father and the Son in Heaven! Jesus was teaching a need for decision.

There is always a certain dramatic quality about life, for in every period of our earthly walk, there are decisions to be made, and we are each confronted with a choice, and we can never evade that choice, because we can never stand still.

When these times of decision come, and we stand at the cross-roads, we must always take one way or the other. The great Bible characters faced these decisions; the great decisions concerning God and the World; Hell and Heaven; Life and Death.

As his end drew near, we read Moses words as he spoke to the people, Deut. 30:15-20. Also, when Joshua was laying down the leadership of the nation of Israel at the end of his life, he presented the people with the same choice, Joshua 24:15:

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day, whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household we will serve the Lord.”

Jeremiah heard the voice of God saying to him, Jeremiah: 21:8: “Furthermore, tell the people, “This is what the Lord says: See I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.”

I like this poem by John Oxenham:

“To every man there openeth, A way and ways and a way;
And the high soul treads the high way, And the low soul gropes the low;
And in between on the misty flats, The rest drift to and fro;
But to every man there openeth, A high way and a low;
And every man decideth, The way his soul shall go.”

That is the choice with which Jesus is confronting men in this passage. There is a broad and an easy way, and there are many who take it; but the end of it is ruin. There is a narrow and a hard way, and there are few who take it; but the end of it is life.

If we go back to Matthew 7:12, the previous verse to the one we have been reading, we find the Golden Rule, verse 12: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” The Golden Rule is the concluding verse of the major part of the Sermon on the Mount.

From this point on Jesus turns to a series of warnings designed to keep His listeners from falling by the wayside through unbelief, apathy, deceit, hypocrisy, or discouragement. This does not mean, of course, that the verses that follow the Golden Rule are not important.

Because, although they are largely in the nature of a postscript, to some people, perhaps like yourself, they could be the most important verses of all. For instance, we may imagine a man who has agreed with the bulk of this teaching, but thinks he can put it into practice merely by exerting a little more effort while continuing in the same general direction in which he is going.

To such a man these verses are a reminder that the Christian life must begin with an about-face and that it cannot be carried on without a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus. Another man finds himself thinking that religion is a good thing, and he determines to go on listening to other teachers.

Jesus warns that there are many false prophets who have gone out into the world, and that religion from these sources will not save you. In the same way Jesus warns against settling for an outward profession of Christianity without experiencing a change of heart, and He cautions that the only valid religious life must be built upon Himself, as the only firm and, therefore, adequate foundation.

Obviously, these warnings apply to many who are grappling with the claims of the Gospel in the time in which we live. We must remember the times in which Jesus gave this Sermon on the

Mount. Jesus was speaking of ultimate things to those who as yet had no knowledge of His coming death and resurrection.

If you are not on the way to Christ, then you are on the way FROM Him. Therefore, you will either come finally to a perfect salvation by the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ or you will come to the lake of fire without Him. That is the heart of Christ's warning.

Another truth also lies at the heart of Jesus' warning, it is the truth that salvation is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ only! What is the gate? What is the way that leads to life? The answer is: the LORD JESUS CHRIST. Jesus had this to say, John 10:9; I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

John: 14:6; "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

These verses throw the proper light upon our text. For they show that Jesus was speaking of faith in Himself, when he told the Galileans, "Narrow is the gate, and hard is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The way to Heaven is as narrow as Jesus.

Christianity is unique in claiming to have absolute truth, since it presents Jesus Christ as the sole way to God. Jesus' words about Himself, as in the texts we have mentioned, are unqualified; and this means that if Jesus is right, as He is, then there are no other ways to God for men to follow.

Let us make this point very clear. First, it means that no man will be able to come to God through nature. That is a popular thought among many people who are dissatisfied with the Christian churches. But the idea that God can be found in nature is an illusion and leads to idolatry.

A man is deluding himself if he thinks that he is worshiping God in nature as he plays golf on Sunday morning or goes for a drive or walk in the country or wilderness. You are either not worshiping at all (which is probably most often the case) or you are worshiping nature, and nature is not God.

We have to be careful about this, for this is call "pantheism". "Pantheism" is the doctrine or belief that God is not a personality, but that all laws, forces, manifestations, etc. of the self-existing universe are God; it is the belief that God is everything and everything is God.

By the way, do you know what the revelation of God in nature is for? The Bible says that it is to condemn men for failing to recognize God. Romans 1:2 says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all men.

Romans 1:2 "For since the beginning of the world the invisible attributes of God, for example, his eternal power and divinity, have been plainly discernible through things which he has made and which are commonly seen and know, thus leaving these men without a rag of excuse."

No man has ever come to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ through nature. In the same way, men cannot find God in mere pious thoughts or religion. That is, they will not find God in mere pious thoughts or religion. That is, they will not find God in the mere performance of certain religious

duties, whether it is a life of meditation, whether they make it the religion of drugs, or even whether it is the ceremonial aspects of Christianity.

God has written a big 'NO' over all human efforts to be religious in order that He might write a big 'YES' over all who abandon religion and turn to Him in Christ. Religion is the seeking after a god in your own image. Christianity is God seeking you and moving to redeem you by the death of His son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Neither can men find God through morality, either by attempting to live up to God's Standard or by attempting to live up to their own standards. Men fall short of all standards. The first 3 chapters of Romans were written to show that no man will find God in any way but through Christ Jesus, and the man with high moral standards is included along with the rest.

Paul describes 3 different types of persons – the pagan man, the moral man, the religious man – but he concludes with a word of condemnation against all human goodness, Romans 3:10-12. "As it is written, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Our natural ways will not lead us to the Father. And yet, there is a way. The way is Jesus. You and I have sinned, in little ways and in big ways (it does not matter which), and sin keeps us from God.

Unless sin is removed we shall never get into God's heaven. In fact, God will not even let us get close to it. On the other hand, even if we ourselves bear a just punishment for sin, we cannot get to heaven either. Why? Because the punishment of sin, is separation from God. Then what is the solution? The solution is that God provided Jesus Christ as a substitute for us, that He died, not for His own sin (because He did not have any), but for your sins and mine.

God will not punish the same sin twice. Therefore, if you will believe that Jesus died for you, if you will acknowledge Him as your substitute, then God will remove your sin forever, and it will be correct to say that you have passed over the narrow way through the narrow gate into salvation.

But do not make the mistake of counting upon your moral record as a way of coming to God. It is our record that gets you into trouble in the first place. Your record will condemn you, no matter how good you think you are or how good you appear in other men's eyes.

Count on the fact that Jesus paid the penalty for your sin, that He did what no other person could do, including yourself. Accept the fact that He by His death provided the way for simple, sinful people like you and me to enter heaven, thru the narrow gate.

So in closing I ask, have you entered in at the strait gate? I am not asking if you have heard of it, and believe there is a gat. I ask not whether you have looked at it, and admired it, and hope one day to go in! I ask whether you have gone up to it, knocked at it, been admitted, and ARE NOW INSIDE?

If you are not inside, what good have you gotten from your religion? You are not pardoned and forgiven. You are not reconciled to God. You are not born again, sanctified, and ready for Heaven. If you die as you are, the devil will have you for ever, and your soul will be eternally miserable.

We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition, we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with God successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

Produced by God's Grace:

FIRST CENTURY GOSPEL CHURCH NJ

Box 99, Pottersville, NJ 07979 USA

e-mail: FCGCUSA@yahoo.com