

## Squeezing Through the Narrow Door

*Luke 13: 22-32*

Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He said to them, <sup>24</sup>“Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. <sup>25</sup>Once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then in reply he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ <sup>26</sup>Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ <sup>27</sup>But he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!’ <sup>28</sup>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 you yourselves thrown out. <sup>29</sup>Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and take their places at the banquet in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup>Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Imagine. It's a bright Saturday morning. You're enjoying a cup of coffee, maybe reading the newspaper when there is a knock on the door. So you get up, answer it, and on the other side stands a neatly dressed gentleman in a suit and tie wanting to hand you some tracks. On the tracks is one question and only one question: “How many have been saved and are you one of them?” Many of us have been asked this question. Jesus is touring around, teaching, when he is asked the same question: “Lord, will only a few be saved?”

Start by thinking about the question. “Will only a few be saved?” Or better yet, start by wondering *who asks these kinds of questions*. From my experience usually the person asking the question is one who believes themselves to already be on the saved side, right? And their swan song is to get me on the taxi to heaven so I can be saved just like they are. Very rarely has anyone who is asking the “saved or not saved” question come from a place of deep compassion. It is usually from a place of anxiety or an identity which is attached to whatever version of God *they have subscribed to and experienced*. And my being “saved or not saved” is contingent on whether or not I buy a subscription to their group's version of God as well. “Lord, will only a few be saved?” the person asks Jesus. Translation: “Will only a few be saved...like I know I am!” Who is usually the kind of person representing what kind of group asks these kinds of questions?

But notice Jesus never answers. He doesn't ask “Will you accept me as your Lord and Savior?” Instead of offering an easy five step solution to salvation he simply says, “Strive to enter the narrow door. Many will try. Many will fail.” Yikes! As if that isn't scary enough, then he launches into a horrible story about an owner of a house who shuts the door. Then someone outside begins to knock, saying, “Lord, open up!” To which the Lord of the house says, “I don't know where you come from.” So the person knocking identifies and justifies themselves: “Lord, we ate and drank with you. We came and saw you when you taught.” In other words, “open up, we are in your group!” But the owner will say again, “I do not know where you come from. Get

away from here!” And he throws them out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. OMG! What a horrifying story! No wonder it gets used as a Jesus recruitment text. Where we hear that unless we are saved, he’s not going to open the door and then what? We get tossed out of the group going up to heaven. Is Jesus saying God’s patience and compassion could run out? As if God’s steadfast love does *not endure forever*.

Well, we know Jesus is often trying to make a point so what is it? How do we read the exclusive story he tells? Of course, by now we’ve learned there are always hidden references Jesus makes. And there is a good reason why the story is horrifying: because it is not an original story. We’ve heard it before. Where else have we heard a story about an owner of a house who shuts the door. But then a mob of people show up knocking and saying “Open the door to us! We are part of your group!” Ah, yes: When Abraham’s nephew, Lot, is hosting a couple of angels in his home. He has offered them food and a place to stay, except the townspeople don’t want strangers around so they pound on Lot’s door saying, “Open up so we may ‘know’ these visitors.” It’s the story of a group of people inside a township who wanted to have their way with the outsiders. They functioned as 4-1. Except Lot stood with the strangers, protected them as the nephew of Abraham—the true way of Israel. It’s a horrible and shocking story, which is why Jesus references it. You see, remember what the name of the town was? Sodom! It’s the story of the destruction of Sodom, brought upon themselves where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. All because they functioned as a group of identitarians, who by attempting to throw out the outsider, threw themselves out instead.

Now Jesus’ words are beginning to make a bit more sense. The Lord answers, “I do not know where you come from.” Is it from a place of identitarianism like Sodom? Or is it from a place where those who are not part of the group—those considered to be “the last”—are treated and protected as if they are the first? It turns out, this is not a story of personal salvation at all, but one which makes us look at our attachment to our group.

So naturally here’s our problem. The narrow door which we are to strive for means our identity can’t be too attached to the group we identify with. Because when we over identify with any group, there will always be an “us” and a “them.” And who do we all desire to take care of first: us or them? We have seen how dangerous it is to over-identify as an American. Because we then say, “America first!” and then how do we treat the stranger? As second-rate citizens. We have seen how dangerous it is to over-identify as a Christian because we say, “Only the saved first!” But you see, it assumes one group is “in” while others are “out.”

The narrow way is a squeeze which lets go of being “in” or “saved” because it’s not the most important thing and Jesus doesn’t seem to be worried about it. The most important thing is to offer welcome and compassion to the outsider because that is what God does and who God’s kingdom is for. God’s welcome is wide, so strive for the narrow door. Then, Jesus says, people from all walks of life and faiths, places and cultures—from the north and the south, from the east and the west—will gather around one table—maybe ours—where they will experience God’s wide welcoming Spirit. And as they do, they will know exactly where it is we come from.