

Strive for Heaven Now, Not Later - Part 2

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 13, where we are going to finish up [the] section we started last week on striving for heaven now, and not later.

If you have ever read John Bunyan's work *[The] Pilgrim's Progress*, you know that at the beginning of the book, the main character, Christian, is living in the city of Destruction. He comes upon a book and he starts reading, and that book makes him realize that he is in huge trouble. He is a sinner, he is guilty, and he is going to be swept away in the destruction that will come upon his city. He doesn't know what to do. He goes home, and he tries to hide his misery and the agony of his soul. His wife and children, of course, notice, and say, "What's wrong?"

He says, "I've been reading in this book, and [it] tells me that I am a sinner, that judgment is coming, [and] that we're all going to be swept away. I don't know what to do."

The family says, "Just relax. You're fine. Everything is fine. We're doing fine. There is peace here. We have a great family."

The next day, he's out walking in the field, and he's agonizing, and weeping, and crying because the knowledge of his sin and his guilt has become like a huge burden on his back. It is then that he encounters a man named Evangelist, who says, "Why are you weeping?"

[Christian] says, “Because I’ve been reading in this book and I realized that my sin and my guilt are going to sink me lower than the grave.”

Evangelist says, “What are you doing standing here?”

[Christian] says, “I don’t know where to go.”

So [Evangelist] says, “Do you see across the field there? Do you see the little wicket gate, way out there?”

[Christian] says, “No.”

[Evangelist] says, “Do you see a shining light in that direction?”

[Christian] says, “Yes.”

[Evangelist] says, “Go that way, and when you find the little wicket gate, knock and it will be opened to you.”

Christian leaves right then, and yet his family sees him leaving, and they say, “Where are you going?” They begin to try to persuade him to come back. “Come on, let’s not be rash, here. Don’t leave us! Stay here in the city of Destruction.” He doesn’t listen to them, and he heads forward. Other people in the city mock him, make fun of him, [and] verbally persecute him. Finally, at least, he is able to persuade two of his friends, Obstinate and Pliable, to come with him. The problem is that at the first hint of trial, they both turn around and go back. [Christian] himself then falls into this swamp called the Slough of Despond [and] almost drowns, [but] a man named Help pulls him out [and] puts him on the straight way again.

You think, “Oh, good, he’s on his way to the wicket gate,” and yet he encounters Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who tells him, “If you want to get that burden off your back, don’t go to the gate, go to Mr. Legality. He can help you through the law [to] get that burden off your back.”

Christian deviates from the narrow way, finds himself on a precipice ready to fall into the very fires of hell, when Evangelist shows up again, and says, “What are you doing here?” rebukes him firmly, and puts him back onto the straight and narrow way. [Christian] finally gets to the gate. He begins to knock, [and] then the [inhabitants of the] nearby castle, which is owned by Beelzebub, the enemy, begin to shoot arrows [at Christian],

trying to kill him before he can enter in the gate. He barely gets in before they shoot and kill him.¹

What Bunyan is picturing here is the very text that [I'm] preaching on, the very text that we are looking at today, where Jesus says, "Strive to enter the narrow way" [see Luke 13:24]. When Bunyan mentions the "wicket gate"—it's not the "wicked" gate, it's the "wicket" gate—[he is implementing] an Old-English term used to describe [a] narrow door, gate, [or] a very narrow entryway. A lot of times in cities, they had very large gates that could [be] open[ed] up [to allow] big chariots [to] come through. Then they would close those [gates]. A lot of times, within the door of the larger gate, [there] was a very small, narrow door [through which] one person at a time could enter. That was the wicket gate. Or, if you just had an especially narrow door, that also would be [considered a] wicket gate.

This is the very thing that Jesus is speaking of in our text [in Luke 13]. He's on His way to Jerusalem, [where] He is going to die for our sins. He knows that time is short, and [though] He is not making a beeline there, He is heading [steadily] in that direction. It keeps saying this over and over as we go through the gospels. He's going from village to village, town to town, and He is preaching because He wants to see people saved. He wants to see them delivered from the wrath that He knows will come because He is the one bringing it. But He is not having very much success. The reason He's not having very much success is that He has offended the religious leaders. The religious leaders are angry with Him because He has exposed their religious hypocrisy [and] their false teachings, [and] He has told them that they were children of Satan [see John 8:44]. And so, they have done everything they can to discredit Him, and have been largely successful.

Not only that, the scribes, Pharisees, [and] rabbis taught that all Jews got to heaven except for the very worst ones. [They said that] the majority [of Jews] were all saved because they were children of Abraham. They were

¹The complete text of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is available at:
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/bunyan/index.htm>

the children of promise, so they knew they were going to get to heaven. But Jesus keeps warning them that they are going to enter into hell unless they repent and believe in Him. This, then, is a collision [between] what they've all been convinced of [and] what they are now hearing for the first time. It disturbs them greatly because it *seems* like what Jesus is saying is that He is the only way to heaven, contrary to what they have believed before, and that all of them are going to perish unless they repent and believe in Him, [which is also] contrary to what they've always been taught. Beyond these things, they look at Jesus, and He isn't all that special looking. He doesn't look all that kingly. As Isaiah says in Isaiah 53[:2], He has no stately form or appearance that we should be impressed with Him.

Not only that, His followers aren't much [to look at] either. [There are] a couple [of] notorious sinners, [a] political rabble rouser, and a bunch of common nobodies. [Jesus] doesn't have an army. He hasn't overthrown Rome, and in [the] mind[s of the Jews], they're picturing all of these texts in the Hebrew Scriptures that tell about the Messiah coming back to destroy the Gentile powers and to set up an everlasting kingdom, and they look at Jesus, they look at His followers, and they just can't do it. They just can't commit themselves to this guy. He can do miracles, and that *is* impressive, but He just doesn't look like the guy [they've] expected all along.

But one thing is coming through Jesus' teaching loud and clear: That in Jesus' estimation, the whole multitude is going to perish in hell and [they are] on their way to hell. This, then, provokes someone in the crowd to ask a question, and then Jesus answers it. That is the context of our passage. You can follow along as I read Luke 13:22 and following:

And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem.

And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door,

and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' In that place 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, but yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last." [Luke 13:22–30]

From this portion of Luke, Jesus gives us five truths about entering into heaven so that we are not deceived into thinking we are on our way to heaven when, in fact, we are [headed to] hell. Last week we [first] looked at an honest question that we should all ask: "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" Second, we looked at a scary answer we should all heed. That scary answer is that all of us, without exception, should strive, literally *agonize*, to enter into the narrow door to heaven. The reason [we should strive], [which] I'm sure shocked [His audience, is] that many who procrastinate and who do not repent and believe in the Messiah will, at a later date, try to enter in through that narrow door, through Jesus Christ, and will not be able. We considered a couple [of] important implications of this. The first is that only a few will be saved. [It] is uncommon in the world today to think that you actually are going to go to hell. You can go out on the streets, you can talk to people, and say, "Do you think you're going to get to heaven?"

They [would likely say], "Yeah, I've been a pretty good person. I'm probably going to end up in heaven," if they believe in heaven.

It's the same thing with the Jews [to whom] Jesus is speaking. They have been taught [that], "Yeah, you're going to go to heaven. You're Jewish, you're a descendant of Abraham, [so] of course you're going to get in. You're one of the chosen people." Yet this is not what the Scriptures teach.

[We also discussed last week that] though you might go to a thousand funerals and hear them say the person [who died, regardless of his spiritual life,] is in a better place, that's not what the Bible teaches. Those people who live for themselves and not for God *do not go to heaven*. They are not in a better place. They are not happier after they die. They're in more misery than ever.

The question Jesus asked in [Luke 13:]23 is, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" We know His answer is going to address the quantity, the [number], of people who get into heaven. Jesus' answer is: "You better agonize to get in the door because many are going to try at a later date to enter and won't be able to enter." This could hardly be taken as affirming that most will be saved, which would be the case if the door were wide and the way easy. Jesus even makes it explicitly clear in Matthew 7[:13–14] in the Sermon on the Mount as He preaches to another multitude in a different circumstance at a different time, and tells them:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The word "few" means just that. It means a small amount, or number, of a larger quantity. Consider the Flood. Out of all the people who lived on [the] earth [at that time], eight were delivered [see Genesis 7:13]. Consider Sodom and Gomorrah, and, if you read the text, the cities of the plain. There weren't even ten righteous people [see Genesis 18:23–19:25]. Consider Israel: one nation among all the other Gentile nations of the world, chosen by God to receive the promises, to receive the Word of God, to receive the

Messiah, and only *some* of them were saved. Paul says in Ephesians 2:11[-12] that the Gentiles were without God and without hope in the world. The Old Testament often describes the number of believers as “the remnant” or “the righteous remnant” [see Ezra 9:15]. The Hebrew word [translated] “remnant” literally means “residue.” If you were to take a bowl of soup and pour it out and then shake it and turn it back over, that little tiny bit that’s left [in the bowl], the residue, is the quantity [that will be saved] in comparison [to the original amount].

Finally, [in the previous sermon] we talked about what appears to be a contradiction to salvation by grace, as Jesus commands us to *strive* to enter the narrow door, saying that if we don’t we will perish. The question is: If we have to do it, if we have to strive, if we have to enter in, then isn’t salvation by works? Since we’re going to see this over and over again, we stopped to try to address this apparent contradiction. The Scriptures clearly teach in many places that salvation is by grace apart from works. Most Christians who have walked with the Lord very long understand this, that grace is unearned, undeserved favor from God, [which] He gives us that we might be saved. Pretty much every Christian knows that, but what most Christians do not understand is how grace works.

Grace is not a divine “zapping.” Grace is not a magical declaration. Grace comes in the form of various gifts that God gives us that we must employ to gain access into heaven. Yet this is not how most people think of it. As soon as you mention grace and works in the same sentence, the hair on peoples’ necks stands up. Why? [It is] because they think of texts like Romans 11:6, where Paul says: “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace,” and they [say], “See!” Or they think about Galatians 5:4, where Paul says: “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Verses like these, plucked out of context, create misunderstandings that if God’s grace is involved, works are completely absent. Yet what Paul is talking about in Romans 11:6 is that when it comes to God choosing which

Jews He will save, it is not on the basis of their works that they are chosen, but by [His] grace. Paul, in Galatians 5:4, is addressing those who thought they could be justified before God on the basis of works, and he says, “Of course that isn’t true. You cannot be justified by works.” But this does not mean that grace is not even in the proximity of works or [that it] doesn’t produce works in us. When saving grace comes to a person’s life, it will cause things to happen.

We are all familiar with Ephesians 2:8–9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,” something you don’t earn, “not as a result of works,” in case you didn’t catch [that concept the first time], “so that no one may boast.” Then verse 10 [says]: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*,” you can say it, it doesn’t hurt, “which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” [emphasis added]. He says something very similar in Titus 2:11–14: “For the grace of God has appeared. . . instructing us to deny ungodliness. . . to live sensibly, righteously. . . in the present age looking for the. . . appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to. . . [be] zealous for good deeds.” Grace *always* produces good works.

There is this concept, this fear, of putting the works of man as the means, the ground[s], of our salvation, so much so that we’ve pitched works altogether, and we’ve denied that grace even creates works in us. Many Christians are saying, “Well, I am saved by grace. I know I don’t obey God, I don’t read my Bible, I don’t share my faith, I don’t love the saints, I don’t love His people, but I’m saved by grace.” No, you’re not.

Let’s say that I was artistically lousy. We don’t even have to say it. I am. I have problems [drawing] stick people. So, I have a problem. [Let’s say] you are a great artist and you invite me over to your house for dinner. We’re there, and [you] say, “Are you doing anything later tonight?”

“No, I’ve got the whole evening free.”

“Let’s paint a picture.”

“I don’t paint. I hardly do stick people.”

“Sit down.” So you sit me down in front of a blank canvas, and you’ve got this big palette and these brushes. You say, “OK, this is what we’re going to do. I’m going to tell you what to do. I’m going to hold your hand. You’re going to hold the brush. You’re going to listen to me. I don’t want you to fight me. I want you to submit to me. I’m going to help you. I’m going to give you instructions. I’m going to guide your hand and we’re going to paint something.”

I say, “OK.”

You say, “OK, take the lid off of here. Put this here. Mix these paints in here. Thin this out. Add these colors. OK, we’re going to start putting these here. Do these strokes like this. Use this brush like this.” We’re painting, painting, painting late into the night.

[I say], “Man, it’s looking great!” And when we get done, it’s a masterpiece.

You say, “Take it home.” So I take it home, let the paint dry, frame it up, and stick it on the wall.

People come [over to my house], and [say], “Man! Nice painting! Who did that?”

What do I say? There’s a part of me that wants to say, “Well, you know, I did that.” I mean, after all, I held the brush. I was there the whole time. But really, I’d have to say, “You know what? I kind of painted that, but I don’t even like to paint, so if it wasn’t for [my friend who is an artist], I wouldn’t have done that. I wouldn’t have even attempted [to do it]. It was [his] skill, wisdom, artistic ability, [and] assistance that enabled me to do this. And so, really, it’s [his] picture that [he] painted through me. So, I guess it’s not mine, though I did it.” Do you see that? That’s kind of how it is with the grace of God.

Let’s say I preach the gospel to you. The gospel itself is one of the great gifts of God, right? Now, if I preach it to you, then you are receiving the grace of God through me, right? The Word of God is a gift of His grace. Let’s say you go down [to a store] and you buy a Bible. A lot of people died, and worked, and printed, and stacked, and packaged to get that Bible

on the shelf so you could pay good money for it. And you know what? You may acquire that book, and yet you know that book is a gift of God's grace, though many people were involved in getting it to you, including yourself.

Our works apart from the grace of God do not provide the means of our salvation—ever. But when saving grace comes, works always follow. So, when Jesus says, “Strive to enter the narrow door,” He’s not affirming that our salvation is by works, He is commanding us to enter through the narrow door so that *He*, by His grace, can save us. When we’re saved, when we know Christ, just as salvation is by grace, so we grow in godliness, or are sanctified by grace. The Scriptures teach both. That is why Paul says things like this in 1 Corinthians 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

You’re thinking, “Did you labor, Paul?”

“Yes.”

“Then why did you say, ‘Not I’?”

“Well, I labored, but it was God behind the scenes supplying the grace so that I could. So He gets the credit, but yeah, I did it.”

In Philippians 2:12–13, [Paul] tells the Philippians: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to *will* and to *work* for His good pleasure” [emphasis added]. So, are we supposed to do it or [does God] do it? Yes. Colossians 1:29 [says]: “For this purpose also *I labor, striving*,” agonizing, “according to His power, which mightily works within me” [emphasis added]. Saving grace, as well as sanctifying grace, enables us to do the will of God. The final analysis: If we enter in through the narrow door, we will have entered through the narrow door by the grace of God and only by the grace of God. But this does not eliminate our necessary response, because God works through our response to His grace. So, Christ is not saying in our text, “Be your own Messiah,” but “Do everything to enter through *Me*, the Messiah, by grace.”

So, now we come to the third of the five truths found in the text: A fact you should not ignore. Just having explained, in [Luke 13:]²⁴, that only a

few will be saved because the door to heaven is narrow, Jesus continues the same figure of speech, but He adds to it. Look at [Luke 13:]25, [where] He says: “Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open up to us!’ ” And you know what? This is so brilliant. Sometimes when you’re into certain things, you see different things when you read the Bible. I’m into preaching and teaching. That’s kind of my thing. So, when I see Jesus doing things like this, it just amazes me how He is speaking to these Jews and all of a sudden He transports everybody [to whom] He’s speaking outside the door that must be entered through to get to heaven. He’s on one side and they’re on the other side, and He’s letting them see in their mind[s that] they’re on the wrong side. *He* is the head of the household who has control over who comes in through the door. But Jesus now shuts the narrow door so that it is impossible to enter.

Just imagine in your mind [that you’re living] outside a huge castle. There are the giant gates, and within the gates there is the little wicket door inside the giant one. This isn’t one of those dingy castles that you see in movies. This is one made out of pure, white marble, shining and glistening, with elaborate carvings and figures. [It’s a] gilded, stunning castle with a gold door. There you are, living just outside of this beautiful, huge, walled castle. Whatever is behind there, the walls seem to go on forever. You’re on one side, and there is this little doorway to enter into whatever is on the other side.

The king of that great castle has sent out a decree into all parts of his land, telling everyone in his kingdom to enter in through the narrow door that they might be reconciled to him, that they might know him, that they might dine in his presence, be his people, and be blessed. But, hey, even though you see these decrees posted, have heard them uttered in your little village, you’ve got a family, you’ve got a business, you’ve got a home. You can’t just leave all of that. You’re not going to leave your family. Life is good. The weather is good where you live. You’re happy. You’re healthy.

You've got a great family. You've got great friends. You've got a great community. Besides, this is a time of peace.

You think to yourself, like most other people in your town and village [are doing], "Listen, if things get rough, if the king sends forth his armies and he's going to start judging people, of course we're going to run to the gate and we'll enter in, and we'll escape. But for right now, we don't see any judgment. Everything looks great."

Then one day, shortly after lunch, the sky turns dark, strong winds begin to blow, lightning and thunder [crackle in the sky], hysterical people begin to run into town, telling you, "The king's armies have come out and they're slaughtering everybody without exception. Flee for the castle!" You grab your wife and your two little kids, and you begin to run for the castle wall. As you approach, there's this gigantic [crowd of] people just pressing in toward the narrow gate.

There are four instances [in which] people won't enter in. The mob [trying to get into the castle] is like all of those who waited in the days of Noah. You remember what happened. Noah preaches to them [and] tells them to enter in. For 120 years they scoff at him, and then what happens? There is this very scary day when God closes the door of the ark, and then all the people what? Then they all want to enter in, don't they? They all want to enter in when it is too late. Then they are all judged. And so, what [are the] four instances [in which] the door to heaven [is] shut [and] we can't enter in? One: After death. There is no repentance from sin [after death]. If you wait until after you die, and then decide, "I'm going to give my life to Christ," it's too late. The door is shut.

[Two]: After rejecting the truth too many times. The Scriptures say there is a point—we don't know when that point is—when [you are] beyond the hope of entering in. You can't get in after a certain point. It is impossible. The author of Hebrews speaks of those for whom it is impossible to renew again to repentance. In [Hebrews] 10:26[-27], he says [that] if we go on "sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of

judgment.” [There] no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. There’s no way to get your sins atoned for? No.

Peter talks about it in 2 Peter 2, when he says, “Listen, if you have gained a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you begin to walk in the Lord, and you begin to know the truth, and you have escaped the defilements of the world, and after knowing the truth, knowing the gospel, knowing God’s people, hanging around the church, you have turned back again to a sin of rebellion against God, it’s over. The last state for you has become worse than the first” [see 2 Peter 2:20]. What is the first state? You’re an unbeliever without knowledge on your way to hell. What is the last state? You’re an unbeliever *with* knowledge on your way to hell without any hope of being saved. [It is] a scary thought that for some the door gets welded shut. We don’t know who they are, but we know it’s true for some because God’s Word tells us.

[Three]: The door is shut to those who wish to enter on their own, apart from God’s grace. If you think you can be good enough to get in, you think your works, your philanthropy, your giving, your morality will get you into the kingdom of heaven, you are wrong, for you only enter by God’s grace. [Four]: If you wait until after the Second Coming, the door will be shut. If you wait until the skies are rent and the sign of the Son of Man appears like lightning from the east and the west when He sends forth His angels, and you think, “Uh, oh, I’d better run for the gate to the castle,” it’s closed. Don’t even bother.

And so, [to return to the illustration of Luke 13:25–27], there you are outside the castle walls, crying out, “Let us in! Let us in! We’re your subjects!”

The king comes out on the little parapet on top of the battlements, and he looks down, look at the middle of [Luke 13:]25, and this is what he says: “He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ ”

“You do not know where we are from? Of course you do! You’re the all-knowing king. You know everything! We just live in the village over the

hill. What do you mean you don't know where we're from? We want to come in!"

But you're blind. You don't understand what [the king, who is Jesus], is even saying. Of course He knows you exist. Of course He knows the town you live in. But what He's saying is, "You don't have a personal relationship with Me. You've never been reconciled to Me through faith. You don't have My forgiveness. You don't have atonement for your sins. You have violated My law. I have posted My law. I know you've broken My law. You know you've broken My law. I have offered to be reconciled to you, to forgive you if you will enter in, and you will not enter in. That means you're still an enemy. I don't know where you are from." It's like those [people] in Matthew 7:21–23, where Jesus says:

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

They know about Jesus. They call Jesus "Lord." They're around Jesus' people. They're even claiming to do miraculous deeds in Jesus' name. Jesus says, "I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." The phrase "I never knew you" means "I never had a personal relationship with you; you were never reconciled to Me." It's equivalent to the words that the king utters from the battlements of the castle here [in Luke 13:25]: "I do not know where you are from."

But you and the multitude outside are desperate. You've got to get in. Judgment is coming and you know it. So then you begin to argue with the king. This leads us to our [fourth truth]: An argument you will not be able to use before God. Look at [Luke 13:]26: "Then you will begin to say, 'We

ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ ” It is true. When Jesus is speaking to the Jews who are standing before Him, many [of them] did eat and drink in His presence. Many probably were among those who ate and were filled on the hillsides when He fed the 5,000 and the [4],000 [see Matthew 14:13–21; Luke 9:10–17; Matthew 15:29–39]. Some of them probably had Him in their houses. They heard Him teach in their synagogues or in their streets. They were among the masses [that] crowded around to hear Him, watch Him perform miracles, and hear Him preach the gospel.

But here is their error: They thought that being in proximity to Jesus was sufficient for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is a mistake that many in the Church today will make. They will think that because they are around God’s people; because they have a knowledge of the Church, a knowledge of the Scriptures, a knowledge of Christ; because they went to AWANA; because they memorized Scripture; because they have the gospel down forward and backward, therefore they get to enter in. But that is like standing outside the castle, and saying, “There is the door. There is the castle. This is what we need to do to escape,” and then to stand outside. Each person must individually come through the narrow door.

I can read all about George Washington, Genghis Khan, or Julius Caesar, but that doesn’t mean I know them personally. I can go and visit where they lived, [but] it doesn’t mean I know them personally. Just because you have all the knowledge of how to enter in, and who Jesus is, and what He did, and the people of God, and the experience of the Church of God, it doesn’t mean you enter in. You *must* enter in. Knowledge of how to enter in alone will not save you. If you appeal to knowing about Jesus and His teachings, look at [Luke 13:]27: “And He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.’ ” If you do not enter in through the narrow door, Jesus doesn’t see you as just somebody outside, but [as] an evildoer.

It will surely be a shock to those religious, professing Christians who don’t know Christ when, after going to church all their lives, sacrificially

giving, teaching in Sunday school, and having great knowledge of the gospel, [they] end up in hell. [It] is a scary thought that Jesus would describe [the] works [of the Jews to whom He is speaking] as evildoings. The Jews [to whom] He's speaking [aren't part of] the axe murderer club. This is a bunch of good people—fine, upstanding Jews who are trying to submit to Rome, obey God, sacrifice in the temple, and go to synagogue. These people are doing what is right.

There's a widespread ignorance, and I suppose even a denial, that if you profess to know Christ everything you do is right because you know Christ. But that's not the case. Most people just won't bring themselves to admit that everything a person does apart from the Spirit of God, apart from the grace of God, apart from the instructions in the Word of God for the glory of God is *all* sin. Even if somebody does the same thing somebody else does, to them it may be sin, and to the other person it may give glory to God. Why? [It is] because if [one] person is not saved, and [another] person is saved, this [first person's] deed[s] account for sin, [and the deeds of the second person] do not. Why? [It is] because [the second] person is reconciled to God, has the Holy Spirit, [and] is doing things for the glory of God. [The first person is] not.

Turn to Romans 8. I just want to show you this. [In] Romans 8:5–9 notice what is said here. Paul has just said in verse 1 that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” and then he says this in verse 5: “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” So, he's contrasting those who don't know Christ with those who do, those who walk in the flesh, and those who walk in the Spirit. Notice what he says [in verse 6]: “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is” notice this, “hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God,” notice very closely here:

for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

[The person who is in the flesh] is hostile to [God]; he can't obey Him and never does. That's what [Paul is] saying. If you don't know Christ, you can't do anything to please God. All good deeds account for nothing unless first you're reconciled to the King. Here we learn a truth that many forget, or deny, or are ignorant of: that if you don't do things by God's grace in the power of the Holy Spirit, it accounts for nothing. Though the world may say, "Well, this is a very good person, a very self-sacrificing person," to God you're an evildoer until you come to Christ, until you enter into that narrow door.

What is left for [the Jews to whom Jesus is speaking]? The king commands them to depart—look at [Luke 13:]28: "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." These words describe the misery of judgment. In [Luke 13:]28, Jesus says, "When the king says, 'Depart from me evildoers,' in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Well, this is not weeping for joy. This is the weeping [that occurs] when you lose somebody, when your child dies, when there is so much pain, misery, and agony that you just cry. You see doom is coming and you can't escape, and so you just cry. "Gnashing of teeth" describes a mixture of misery and anger, like an animal that is caught in a trap. Its paw is in the trap, it knows that it's going to die, and it's just snarling. It's angry because it cannot escape.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth is a synonym for hell. Jesus uses it in six other places in the gospels, all in the Gospel of Matthew. For instance, in Matthew 13:41–42, we read:

The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who com-

mit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

He says the same thing in Matthew 13:50. In Matthew 22:13 and 25:30, He uses this phrase along with people being cast into “outer darkness,” another synonym for hell. In Matthew 24:51, the evil slave who didn’t do his master’s will, who procrastinated, who presumed his master wouldn’t be coming back for a long time, and who was caught off guard, that slave is cut in pieces [and] assigned a place with the hypocrites, where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” [which is] again a synonym for hell. So, Jesus is telling us here [in Luke 13:28] that if we don’t enter *now* into that narrow gate, we may get caught off guard, and as we put off our salvation, we may discover that when we finally want to enter, the door is shut.

To add misery to pain, Jesus says, “Yes, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” and now He gives a reason, [about] which you may think, “Oh, this isn’t bad,” but to Jews it’s terrible. He says: “When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out” [Luke 13:28]. This would have just been a horrific thought [to the Jews. They would think], “Abraham—[we’re] children of Abraham! Isaac and Jacob, man, they’re our guys! The prophets? They’re our heroes.”

Jesus is saying, “You know all of [the] heroes that you claim—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets—the ones that you claim to follow, the ones you claim to believe, the ones that you idolize? Picture yourself outside the gate, which is where you are. You’re going to be seeing those people entering into the kingdom, and you yourselves are going to be cast out.” Many professing Christians will have the same experience. They will see themselves as upright, moral citizens; they will claim to believe in the right things, [to] be followers of Jesus Christ—“I follow Paul; I love Peter; I love the apostles; I love Abraham; I love Moses; I love the prophets”—and yet [they will] see [those people] entering [while they themselves are] being cast out. [That] is a terror. To hear Jesus say, “Depart from Me you

evildoers, I don't know where you're from," would be terrifying when you aligned yourself, [or] thought you had aligned yourself, with the very people who are entering in when you're cast out.

[Now] we come to the [fifth truth from Luke 13:22–30], which is: A promise that should comfort you. Thankfully. I was thinking, "Man, this text is heavy, but there is a little bit of hope at the end." Look at [Luke 13:]29: "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God." The "they" here is referring to those few who did not delay, who entered in to the narrow door, who agonized and made it. Jesus says here that they will come from the east, west, north, and south. In other words, they'll come from all the nations of the world.

This must have really been a mind blower to these Jews, who were taught that the Israelites get in [but] no one else gets in. You've got to be of Abraham or you don't get in. Now Jesus is saying, "Not only are you outside the door [and] you're going to be standing out there when you see all your heroes enter in, [but] you are [also] going to see a bunch of Gentiles enter in while you are cast out." Oh! It would have been heartbreaking to think, "Here we have 'salvation is first to the Jews,' we have the promises, we have the covenant, we have the prophets, we have the Messiah, and [yet] we're outside and those Gentile dogs are entering in!" Well, [they] wouldn't enter in. [They] had the opportunity. [They] waited too long. But this is good news for you and me, [because] most of us here are Gentiles. Though a few are Jews who have entered in, most of us [are] not. God, by His grace and mercy, has opened the door, not only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well. It's been opened to us for over 2,000 years, and Jesus is saying, "Enter in," and yet most people will not. They will not enter in.

Jesus says [in Luke 13:30]: "And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last." There is a complete reversal of things. Sins, Satan, demons, [and the] evil men of this world are all going to be put down. The righteous who are persecuted are all going to be exalted. There [is] going to be a huge economic reversal. Many in this world who are poor,

who are persecuted, will be exalted to great riches; and those who are rich in this world, many of them will be put down to utter poverty. The proud will be totally humbled, and the humble will be totally exalted. Many of the Jews who thought they were entering in will not enter in, and many of the Gentiles will be saved instead.

Don't miss the heart of this text. The whole thing here is a warning, but it's a warning for a good purpose. Jesus says all these things, warns with all of these things, because of this: He wants each of us to think about where we're standing. Are we standing outside the gate or have we entered in through faith in Christ? Which one are you? What have you done? I think there are probably a number of people here this morning (I'm sure there always [are]) who don't know Christ, who haven't entered in. You may be familiar with the Church; you may be familiar with a lot of different things; you may have a lot of knowledge of Jesus, the Bible, and things that are surrounding Christianity, but that knowledge doesn't get you to enter in. Your proximity to Christians doesn't save you. Your knowledge alone won't save you. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. You must enter in through [the narrow door]. You must agonize today. It is only today that Jesus offers to you. There is never an offer of salvation to you tomorrow. It is only today because you don't know what tomorrow will bring. The door may be shut for you tomorrow.

I was thinking about how there are those who, after hardening their hearts to the truth, have the door shut to them, and I always wonder when I preach if there is somebody here who, that morning, will have the truth shut to them forevermore, and God will never again draw them, convict them, appeal to them again. They will be excluded permanently from the kingdom of God because they have rejected the truth so many times. I don't know who that is, but I hope it's not anybody here.

Jesus will be reconciled with you. The door is open today. He says, "Come to Me all you who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest [see Matthew 11:28]. Enter in to the joy of My kingdom today." You can have it because He died for you, because He rose for your justification,

and He will do it if you will agonize to get in there, through faith and trust [in] Him. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your mercy, we thank You for Your grace, which calls us, commands us to repent and believe in Jesus, to enter into the narrow way. You have done everything that is necessary for us to escape the wrath to come, when Your armies will go forth and gather from the earth all the evildoers for judgment. Yet, Father, we can enter in now; the door is still open. It is narrow, but there it is. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is standing, who is begging, pleading, and commanding that we enter in. Father, if there [are people] here who don't know You, [people] here who have not given their lives to You, oh, Father, help them to believe. May they cry out to You, may they say, "Lord, I don't know what to do, but I'm going to keep striving until I know I have entered in." Save them from their sins, save them from the consequences of those sins. Help them to be broken, to strive to enter in so that they might be saved. Father, we just ask that You would do this. And for the rest of us, may we leave here rejoicing for Your grace, which has enabled us to enter in. We pray all this in Christ's name, Amen.

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