

“Are Only a Few Going to be Saved?”

‡ Agonizing narrow door (vv.22-27)

‡ Eternal freedom from agony (vv.28-30)

In the name of Jesus, our merciful Savior, dear fellow heirs of Christ’s kingdom:

Any mountain climber will tell you there are few things more exhausting than pushing higher and higher in elevation as the air gets thinner and thinner. Your legs can turn to rubber in a few seconds and catching your breath is hard. Add loose volcanic cinders like the Cascade mountains, plus gathering clouds of dry lightning and a friend who’s really out of shape – it can be a hard push to the next rock. But you can’t take on the whole mountain at once. And when your eyes finally top the last ridge, wilderness stretches before you, exhilaration you never forget – as long as you live to tell about it.

That’s how Jesus’ answers can seem. His disciples ask, “**Are Only a Few Going to be Saved?**” and you wonder if Jesus really answers. But if you just stick with Him, you soon realize He’s taking you up and over the summit of another mountain. He opens vistas before you that never would appear if you just played video games or watched movies. Here is wisdom that just won’t quit for all eternity. That doesn’t mean it’s always pleasant, but then, neither is mountain climbing or training for a marathon or concert or recital. Pile all your accomplishments in a lifetime heap, but you’ll only have a tiny pebble compared to the mountain of God’s grace in Christ. Safe with Jesus, we take an honest look at the...

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Jesus’ sermons can certainly sound harsh until you realize what He was up against. Just a few verses before our text Jesus was teaching in a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath, the day God commanded the Israelites to worship. He did not tell any other believers to worship on Saturday. In fact, He specifically makes the day a matter of freedom in the New Testament. (Colossians 2:16f) Jesus sets us free to worship Him regularly and faithfully like a poor disabled woman who came to church that day. For eighteen long years she could not stand up straight. God’s Son is so powerful and kind! *“When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.”* ¹³*He placed his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and began to glorify God.* Everybody should be happy for her, right? Not the ruler of the synagogue: *“There are six days to do work. So come to be healed on those days and not on the Sabbath day!”* Jesus will not stand for cruelty – religious or otherwise. *“Hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you untie his ox or his donkey from the manger on the Sabbath and lead it to water?”* ¹⁶*Here is this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years! Shouldn’t she be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?”* ¹⁷*As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame. But the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things he was doing.*

So we all agree that justice and kindness should be the order of the day, right? But then the question betrays our own hypocrisy. **“Are Only a Few Going to be Saved?”** The question implies: *We’re all good, or at least I am, but what about those other guys?* More often the concerned religious of our day will ask, “What about the people in China...or the Amazon...or people in America who have not heard of Jesus?” One brother pastor answers, “Name one.” You could add, “If you know one, tell one.”

As usual, Jesus does much better. He cuts through our self-righteous assumptions. Pastors have them. Church volunteers, plus wives of pastors and councilmen. Good neighbors too! All want to assume, *I’m sure I’m okay, maybe a few others, but* **“Are Only a Few Going to be Saved?”** beyond our little club? Jesus’ takes us up the mountain to see a more important question: *What makes you so sure you will be saved?* Notice He’ll get you there, but not by hypocritical self-righteousness.

“Strive,” in Greek gives us our word, *agonize* – like an athlete in strict training, **“Strive to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.”** Timing is everything. *The narrow door* stands open now. It’s only as wide as the cross. Enter through Jesus now so that you can stand with Him on Judgment Day. Soon the day of grace will be past and gone. **“Once the master of the house gets up and shuts the door, you will begin...”** See what Jesus is saying? **“You will begin,”** but then it will be too late **“to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ‘Lord, open for us!’ He will tell you in reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’”** How terrifying for God the righteous Judge to deny even the most basic knowledge of those who thought they knew Him. **“Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’”** Some would say, “We ate your Holy Supper too!” But **“without faith it is impossible to please God.”** (Hebrews 11:6) **“And he will say, ‘I don’t know where you come from. Depart from me, all you evildoers.’”**

Jesus also pictured it this way: **“Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. ¹⁴How narrow is the gate, and how difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** (Matthew 7:13f) A million ways to hell, but Jesus is the only one Way to heaven. It’s an **Agonizing** struggle to deny your sinful pride and self righteousness to enter through the **narrow door**. But then look up. What a view!

† Eternal freedom from agony (vv.28-30)

Some will argue, “My God would never damn anyone!” Or insist, “If there is a hell, it’s really not that bad.” Just this once in Luke, but five times in Matthew’s Gospel account this warning about **“weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** Jesus saved us **from agony** by dying on the cross in our place. Saved from **eternal “weeping”** – grief, sadness, lost opportunities, rejected by God. Saved from **eternal “gnashing of teeth”** – *angry frustration*, imprisoned, tormented by almighty judgment, no escape. Too late many will discover that any physical, mental or emotional power we creatures have comes alone from our Creator. Deny the Creator God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? He finally will give them their way.

Jesus lovingly warned His fellow Jews and all church people today only because He does not want us to end up that way. **“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown outside. ²⁹People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰And note this: Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”**

Hasn’t Jesus gathered you along with countless souls of repentant Jews and Gentiles **“from east and west, from north and south”**? His gracious plan for you is plain: **Eternal freedom from agony**. Be sure of it because He says that God **“wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.”** (1 Timothy 2:4-6) He assures us that the blood Jesus shed for all **“cleanses us from all sin.”** (1 John 1:7) He gives us His Holy Supper as the pledge and token of that heavenly banquet promised again here. All who put their trust in Christ alone **“will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.”** Jesus wants you to be sure and be there!

Do you feel you might be last in line? Bent over from grief and maybe a bit of guilt, feeling like the disabled woman who struggled into the synagogue that day when Jesus preached? Jesus assures you and me too: **“Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”** More assurances: **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:28-30) **“Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”** (Isaiah 1:18 NIV84)

Don’t waste this day of grace. Instead of asking, **“Are Only a Few Going to be Saved?”** thank God for **Eternal freedom from agony!** Not because of our righteousness, but all because Jesus lived and died and lives again for you! Keep striving, **Agonizing** against self, to enter through the **narrow door**. Jesus has already saved you! May none of us forfeit God’s grace in Christ alone. Amen.

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