

As Jesus continues his long trek from Galilee to Jerusalem, he continues to teach his word as he goes. Somewhere along the way someone calls out a question, **“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”** (v23). We aren’t told where this was, we aren’t told who asked. But we do have an idea of why it was asked. As we’ve learned before, there was a national identity problem for the nation of Israel. The problem was that they identified their religion with their nation. There were many who mistakenly believed that anyone who was an Israelite was going to be saved by virtue of their bloodline and the promises made to their ancestors. Now, that doesn’t mean no one else could be saved, but that was a longer and more complicated process.

But the person here wanted clarification, he wanted to be sure. Are only a few going to be saved? Is it going to be what we expect, or is there a chance that some here won’t make it? And as God is often in the habit of doing, he does not directly answer the question that is asked, but instead provides the answer that needs to be heard. **“Make every effort to enter the narrow door,”** he says, **“because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”** (v24). The person asking the question had asked how many would be saved. Jesus’ answer refocuses the issue. “Don’t be so concerned about how many are going to be saved, be concerned about whether or not you are going to be saved. Because, yes, it will not be as many as you think.”

And just so there’s not any kind of misunderstanding about what Jesus means here, he continues, **“Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’”** (v25-27). Whom is Jesus referring to here if not the people right in front of him? Where did he spend nearly all his time on earth? Among the Israelite nation. These are the people who would have some claim to Jesus in the end. “Hey I know that guy!” would be their defense. But Jesus tells them that is not enough. Everyone is not going to be saved, and not even all of you are going to be saved, he says.

And then, to drive the point home one more degree, he finishes by saying, **“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”** (v28-30). People who you thought meant you were saved, your forefathers; you’ll be able to see them at the feast but you won’t be let in, he tells them, they are of no help to you. And yet, people with no connection to them at all, people from among all the other nations on earth...they will be let in and take their place at the feast. So Jesus makes it quite clear that no, not all of Israel will be saved and no, you don’t have to be of Israel to be saved!

But all of that is secondary to his primary answer, the first response he gave here. **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”** We may not have a national identity to get hung up on, but that doesn’t mean we don’t have hang-ups. And the advice to us is the same. You are not to be so worried about how many will be saved or not as you are to be concerned whether you are saved or not. And the wording in the English rendering here colors the language a little differently than the original. The idea is that entering through this door is an ongoing, lifelong struggle. We talked about that last week when we considered our life as a race that is run. To enter the narrow door is an ongoing process in this life.

To understand that, let’s first consider the door itself. As Jesus states the door is narrow. There is only one path that leads to salvation, there are a thousand wide paths that lead to hell. There is only one way to be saved and it is completely counter-intuitive to what we’d expect. We expect that it would take hard work. We expect that God will take us on our own merits, until we learn his expectations. We have not lived up to the bare minimum of his standards, and so we would then expect that we would have to somehow make up for this if we were to be saved. But the truth is that none of it is done by us. It is all done by Jesus.

Jesus himself is the door, he is the only path to heaven. By the shedding of his own blood, he has made us clean and acceptable to God our Father. Only by his work are we saved, not by any of our own. Not because we are born to this family or that, not because we belong to this church or that. Not by anything we have done, but simply by clinging entirely to Christ for our salvation are we saved.

Now, this may seem to be at odds with what Jesus said. How is this a narrow door that we have to put up a constant struggle to get through? If Jesus died once for all, if this salvation is freely available to all, then how is it narrow? And if he does all the work to make it happen, then why does he describe it as a constant effort? Well as I said, the door is

narrow because the path runs contrary to our nature. It is our nature to expect to be able to save ourselves. It is our nature to look to ourselves for help in trouble. It is not in our nature to depend entirely on anyone or anything else, even if that person is God himself. And so to throw ourselves completely on Jesus and trust in him entirely for salvation is not something we do easily, and in fact, is not something we can do ourselves. Only God can create this change of heart in us, and he only does it through the word.

Once that trust is created, we are on the right path, we have begun to enter the door. But as you and I both well know, it is a process. Because we've all seen faith lost by people. We've seen them give up the only thing that matters and trade it in for reliance on the self. The self doesn't give up just because trust in Jesus has been created. The self is within, constantly seeking to steal control away and push us back onto the wide and comfortable path to hell. For every time God asks us to trust him, with our finances, with our jobs, with our health, with our family, with whatever's important to us; whenever God asks us to trust, the self is right there saying, "You can't do that, you need to be in control!"

It is a constant struggle to stay on the path through the narrow door. And we only stay there by God's power given to us through his word. If we are not hearing and regularly being reinforced by God's word, then the self will win out and we will lose. The door does not stay open forever. Whether the world is called to an end or your life is called to an end, the door will be shut and whichever side you are on is where you are going to stay. This is not a "someday" scenario. For you, this could be today. We hear and read constantly of people taken suddenly even in the prime of life. You have no way of knowing when this will happen. We have to make sure that, by God's power, we are on the correct side of the door when this happens.

As Jesus warns us here, simply knowing who he is, that is not enough. He states quite bluntly that many people who knew him will not be let in because he does not know them. He only knows us, he only recognizes us by our faith, and faith shows itself not just in knowing of Jesus, but in responding to what he's done for us. It will not be enough to pound on the door at the end and yell out, "Jesus, I know you! I learned about how you died for my sins!" There's a difference between knowing that as a statement and trusting in it as truth. The heart that trusts this truth and understands it by God's power also responds in kind. Faith shows itself alive in actions. It responds by wanting to be closer to Jesus and hear more from him at every opportunity. It puts aside the things of this world and cares more about our Savior than the things here. This too, is a struggle, and one we do not ever get quite right here. But the soul that simply says, "I know Jesus, now to get on with my life," is not known by Jesus. That one will be left out when the door shuts, because that is not faith.

Lastly, though Jesus tells us here to be concerned about passing through the narrow door ourselves, we can't help but think about those who are still out there on the other side of the door. As believers, we share the heart of Christ who is concerned about the lost. So in his place, as his ambassadors, we are to go out and share the truth of what he's done with others. We are to teach his message of salvation by faith alone, through his sacrifice so that his word may lead others to pass through the narrow door. As we do this, we remember what he tells us here, the door is narrow. It is difficult to enter. We should not look for people to be coming through in the hundreds, but rather one at a time. We shouldn't be concerned with the count, but rather that we're carrying out the work and helping each other to enter the door all the time.

So make every effort to enter the narrow door. Our God begins it in us and will carry it to completion through his own power. Do not let the old self drag you away from it. Do not let the world distract you. Your time is limited and when the door shuts, that is all there is. Stay connected to your God and the power that will keep you on the right course. Be in his word at every opportunity, not just the ones that fit in your life conveniently. Through his power, put your trust completely in him because he will rescue you in the only way that matters. Don't concern yourself with how many will be saved, just be sure that when the door closes, you're standing on the right side of it. Amen.