



## “a case of Mistaken Identity”

- Luke 13:23-35

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**LUKE 13:23-35** Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 "When once the

Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26 "then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28 "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 yourselves thrust out. 29 "They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 "And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last." 31 On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." 32 And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' 33 "Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. 34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! 35 "See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

**"Lord, are there few who are saved?"** Who this individual is that is asking the question, we don't know. We could theorize that because he was not named that perhaps he eventually didn't survive the journey spiritually speaking. Ultimately the man was asking the wrong question. The crucial question for each of us to ask is **"Am I saved?"** Jesus deals with this question one on one. Wherein the man wanted to speak in 'group think,' Christ instead made it personal. He painted a picture that effectively leaves each man standing alone to both decide and reap the consequences for his or her decision.

*"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. John 6:64*

Jesus does here what He seemed to always do with such 'shotgun' questions; He made the matter personal. **"The question is not how many will be saved, but whether or not you will be saved!"** This sort of fella continues to exist today. The kind that loves to debate predestination, election, post-trib/pre-trib rapture and other difficult doctrines. But when confronted about their prayer life, their devotions, their church 'body life' and service, they grow quiet or sometimes quickly combative. Mankind has always loved to participate in theological discussions, but don't ask them to actually come to a decision and move accordingly!

If I *could* actually produce a book today with the names of every individual who will be saved and spend eternity with Christ...and I gave you that book...would you be obsessed at that moment with counting the names in the book or checking if your name is in there? But we don't have that book...*though it ultimately exists!* So it's easy to speak

in hypothetical terms and vague academic ideals. Because at this moment today, it all seems so...*well*, "not real." That because so many of us still do not *really* believe...despite our church attendance and outward façade.

Throughout scripture there is important and historical realities about Jesus' ministry that our generation rejects, denies, or at least hides away. Such as the fact that Jesus insisted that true discipleship comes with many difficult challenges (see Mk 8:35, Lk 14:33), and that even though large crowds came, *and come*, to hear Jesus in every town and village, there were relatively few who authentically followed Him as disciples. (see Jn 6:66)

The fact is, life around the Christian community has certain worldly "benefits" such as "free bread" and community safety that "*keep them comin' back for more.*" Jesus' test of discipleship in Jn 8:30-31 was directed at those who had "believed" but who ultimately proved to be only professors. Those who just wore an intellectual assent that they took off like a hat when they got home from church. It was not the genuine belief that was willing to share in His suffering, commit to the totality of the journey or to "eat of His flesh and drink of His blood."

The man had asked, "Will the saved be *few*?" Jesus turned it around and asked "Will the saved be *you*?"

Note that these folks in the audience that day were not atheists or agnostics. They believed in the scriptures and lived in basic accordance with them. So Jesus was not addressing a pagan audience. He was talking to the "church" crowd, most of whom assumed that they would go to heaven because they were "good people." But the truth is salvation both then and now requires our earnest effort, our urgent attention, and our careful self-examination. He went so far as to so tell us we must actually *strive* to enter that 'narrow door!' Yet that principle flies directly in the face of much of the modern church that decries the principle of effort in a believers walk claiming that such is legalism and false gospel. What they do with verses such as this one *and in fact so many others like it*, I have no idea!

In fact, the word "strive" in Greek is *agōnizomai* (ag-o-nid'-zom-ahee). Certainly we cannot miss our word "agonize" from the original text. It's a word that is used in concepts of both war and strenuous sporting events. In both of those events one 'wins' because he or she has exerted great effort and energy. One must "strive" to win! Thus any attempt to soften the text's impact rings empty and falls flat! Thus the one who would attempt to paint a picture that we are to just step back and let Jesus do everything on behalf of our salvation and maturation is in fact the false teacher! Indeed "without Him we can do nothing" but essentially without us, He *will do nothing*!

Please note that Jesus is not teaching works based righteousness. Isaiah 64:6 says that our efforts are just 'filthy rags'! What He IS saying is that following Him has a cost. J B Phillips says that "*The Kingdom is not entered by drifting but by decision.*" Jesus uses the present imperative tense of the word also, which tells us that for Him such was a *continual* striving! Such is a striving that is evidenced in one's lifestyle, one's habitual practice. The picture is one of a continual contention and a lifelong war!

There have been those who have walked here amongst us that have moved on with the full intent of finding an easier faith life, and sadly many churches offer such as authentic Christianity. One where the way of Christ is broad and easy. But Jesus said that "*wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" He warns us of those who propagate a contrary idea saying that we are to "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.*"

Keep in mind when reading this passage - *Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die*. His words of warning in answer to this question are some of the last words He will speak! There is an urgency about His mission and His message speaks of that urgency. However, again if this verse is taken out of context, it might lead us to think that something (some work) that we could do would merit entrance **by the narrow door** and thus one can "work" his or her way to heaven. But nothing could be further from the truth that Jesus is saying herein!

Jesus is not teaching works based righteousness. He Himself is the narrow gate that leads to the narrow way, and opens the 'gate' into the sheepfold. The Bible repeatedly states that salvation is **only** by grace through personal faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that such is independent of human works. (Ep 2:8, 9). What Jesus is in fact describing in this command to strive is the unpopular truth that the way of salvation is narrow and "difficult." Peter says "*Therefore, brethren, **be all the more diligent** to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*"

How is that some will then "seek to enter" but will not be able? What is the problem? The punctuation supplied by translators here can lead us to believe that somehow such is 'out of reach' for some of us. But taken in context we get something very different: It should read "...for many will seek to enter and will not be able when once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door." The point is that there is those who will drag their feet...perhaps even intending to come to Christ eventually...perhaps fully planning to one day step up to the plate as a disciple. But time will pass and the 'ship will sail' on without them.

How many folks do we know or *used to know*, that lived with the idea that everything can be fixed later and there is 'always tomorrow?' But as we have discovered both practically and scripturally that often we move beyond the "point of no return." Marriages that are over, damages done, people who move out in a place where they never return. Some in fact are dead. All the while leading up to such they say "*I'll come back...I'll make it right...I'll just venture out a little and then I'll get it together and come home.*" Famous last words by a lot of folks who are lost in the world today and will never find their way back. The thought is always "*I have time...I'll get back someday...I'll commit as soon as I \_\_\_\_\_* (fill in the blank)." But that door named "mercy" will not remain open indefinitely - yes, for a time, **but not for ever**.

Some of you have felt uncomfortable...*perhaps the word would be "bothered,"* by all this challenge to one's salvation status in the recent past messages. Strange that such would be your reaction instead of realizing and acknowledging that such must be very important and even of critical importance if Jesus repeatedly pounds home this teaching! Some have thought the messages are important and crucial...*but for the guy next to me in the pew*. And there have been those of that group who have went on to find out...through God's intervention and events, that they themselves were perhaps not what they thought they were.

Others still today want to stand on their works...the church "doings" that they are participatory in, as the "fruit" of who and what they are in Christ. These that Jesus spoke of were cut from that same 'bolt of cloth.' They were participatory in religious activities and were in proximity of God and those who truly were committed to Him. They witnessed the miraculous and shared in the corporate blessing. But they failed to see that salvation is not experienced through osmosis or through the 'herd' experience. They personally and individually failed to commit, failed to participate, and failed to engage.

We claim “*God, you were around us as we lived. I saw you at church...I bumped into you occasionally in my life passing.*” But none of that will matter. His answer will be, “Well, that may be true, but I never *knew* you...” This passage is extremely important in *our* world where we are often taught that living in the proximity of Christ and the church is enough to be alright with God. How many of us remain on the outside of that *relationship* with Christ, only knowing *of* Him, but never *knowing Him*? We will be faithful to “all things religious” until we die, but we will still die without redemption because we never actually surrendered the living out of our lives to His control and plan. We wanted a Savior, but we never surrendered to a “Lord.” Thus we never really found Him despite our proximity. Jer 29:13 “*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*”

Many have been Christ’s guests, have had an intimate conversions with him, and have shared in his favors. They have eaten and drunk in His presence, at his table. But Judas ate bread with Christ, dipped with him in the dish! Under the disguise of their external profession, they have received the Lord’s supper, and ate of the children’s bread, as if they were children. They have been Christ’s hearers, have received instruction from Him, and are well acquainted with His doctrine and rules. And still they remain master and lord of their own lives. Starving to death while surrounded by a proverbial banquet!

This is the state today of so many church-goers and religious participant. Jesus is pulling out all the stops in attempt to awake the sleeping souls. I am not under any illusion that I will succeed where Jesus failed. So very many will still eventually find themselves in the place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Continuing to follow Jesus... “abiding” is the language He gave as a prerequisite to define what constitutes a genuine disciple (see Jn 8:31) These so called “*believers*” proved themselves to be only *professors*. Those who had only an intellectual *belief* as their subsequent actual living proved. We thought we were something, but in reality it was a “case of mistaken identity.”

It’s very popular today to embrace a “no cost-no effort” Christianity, using phrases such as, “All you need to do is *believe.*” And that is effectively true, but scripture says “believe *in* me,” not “*of*” me! That was the mistake of those in this segment of scripture. If we believe *in* Him, we believe in the things He said and taught. We believe all He is as truth, and if we believe those things, we *live* those things.

There were those who tried to warn Jesus off. Away from the impending trials and pain. Plenty will do the same to you today. They will try to get you to temper your zeal and marginalize your passion. “*You will get hurt out there...your participation in radical faith and that church will cost you too much! You don’t have to live that way! Jesus loves you the way you are. He is not asking for such zealous living!*”

“*You don’t have to die.*”

Awe...but you *do!* Jesus spoke repeatedly to His disciples about taking up their cross (an instrument of death) and following Him. He made it clear that if any would follow Him, they must deny themselves, (which means giving up their lives—spiritually, symbolically, and even physically, if necessary) and “follow Him.” His life led to death and new life. This was, and is, a prerequisite for being a follower of Christ, who said that trying to save our earthly lives would result in our losing our lives in the kingdom. But those who will give up their lives for His sake would find eternal life (Matthew 16:24–25; Mark 8:34–35). Indeed, Jesus even went so far as to say that those who are unwilling to sacrifice their lives for Him cannot be His disciples (Luke 14:27).

The fact is, today many of our houses are “desolate.” We are being made a fool at the hands of Satan, that has convinced us that compromise and negotiation are viable elements of Christianity. But such is a lie, and a lie that will cost us eternity. Who are you today? Do you know for sure?