

What if I were to say to you... something along the lines of... “We must **agonize** over being sure to enter the kingdom of God”...? Think about it for just a moment...? ... Does that even **sound** true...? If I declared it... would you think that I had given myself over to heresy...? Does it sound like a statement from a **cult**... or most certainly a works-salvation religious system...? Do you think Christ would have ever made a statement similar to that – “We must agonize over being sure to enter the Kingdom of God...” ? ... May I tell you something...? He **did**. ... And we find such a statement from Jesus in our passage this morning in our study through Luke’s Gospel.

Our passage today begins in Luke 13 with verse 22. Let’s turn our attention there and read the first three verses.

Luke 13:22-24

No one is ever saved **because** of their own effort. ... But (hear me carefully) - no one ever believes **without** effort. ...

There is nothing I can do to initiate a right standing before God... God... in Christ has done on the cross... what I could **not** do for myself...! Anyone who believes this about Jesus... and commits themselves to Him... including being willing to confess this in public... (especially in times like these when the public does not like the exclusive and narrow-minded sounding claims of the Gospel) ... such a person can know that they have passed through judgment to life... and now walk in relationship with Jesus.

No one is ever saved because of their effort... but our believing **does** take effort. ... In fact... let me go so far as to say this... because Jesus said it: “we need to **strive**...(actually the original word here is “agonize”) to enter

through the narrow door... ... It must be sought with all that we are. Salvation is not the result of a minimal... quick and easy praying the sinners prayer – and then going on your merry way... without ever giving yourself to the Lord. It takes individual effort and we must **agonize** over being sure to enter the kingdom of God.

I am not suggesting that any true believer needs to wring their hands and worry whether or not they are saved. ... But once a person is saved – his faith often comes under attack... and we sometimes have to **contend** for our faith... against various assaults that are launched against it by Satan, his emissaries, and an unbelieving world that is becoming increasingly hostile.

Our passage today declares that salvation has only **one path** and that path is **narrow**. ... Our secular and pluralistic society jumps all over that one... doesn't it...? ... *"What...? Are you audacious enough to believe that yours is the only way... that the road is not much bigger to accommodate all the people on this earth who have never heard of Jesus...?"* ... and our answer is... *"Well... ahh... Um..."*

We must **agonize** over being sure to enter the kingdom of God.

Our passage this morning will also tell us that the day is coming when God will shut the door of Heaven and everyone who did not establish a relationship with Jesus will be sent to Hell. So the voices that we contend with... leap with their response: *"Common! Does that sound very loving to you...? Do you really want to follow a God like that...? ... What kind of a God sends people to Hell, simply because they have not heard of your Jesus and established a relationship with Him...?"*

We must **agonize** over being sure to enter the kingdom of God.

Often what causes the believer today to agonize over being sure... are the very concepts that are presented in today's passage. Namely... there is a Hell and all who don't know Christ in a personal way will go there. Hell is not going to be a fun party – but in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And... Salvation is a narrow path where few are on it... and most people are on the much broader path and are going to Hell.

So, in part this morning... I want to take these issues that believers sometimes agonize about... and examine if they really should be valid concerns – whenever a non-believer raises them as an objection. But first... lets read the entire passage... and then deal with these opposing matters.

Luke 13:22-30

Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem. He had most recently been in Perea with His disciples and visited some of their towns and villages. Perea was on the Eastern side of the Jordan River and was **Gentile** country. In light of His making His message available to non-Jews... an unnamed person in the crowd... (probably a Jew)... shouts a question to Him: "Lord, only a few people (us Jews) are going to be saved... right?" ... This was a smug... self-complacent question... because the general understanding among the Jews was that **all** Jews... except the very worst... would be saved. ...The Mishnah was explicit about this:

All Israelites have a share in the world to come, for it is written, Thy people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever;

the branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified. And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and [he that says] that the Law is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean. (Sanhedrin 10.1)

So when this question rang from the crowd... the expected answer was for Jesus to affirm... that all **Jews** would make it through the pearly gates... unless (of course) they had committed some heinous offense or especially grievous sins... The Jewish hearers in the crowd **also** expected Jesus to affirm another common belief... that all Gentiles were going to be **excluded** from the kingdom... except for, perhaps... a few proselytes who followed the examples of Rahab and Ruth... who were Gentiles that converted to Judaism. ... So this was a question... a rather presumptive query... that was meant to solidify Jewish feelings of religious superiority. ... Bear this in mind as you notice how Christ answers him.

Jesus really did not answer the questioner... but responded, instead, with a command... as seen in verse 24: "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

Jesus' words assaulted Jewish complacency. "Many [of you Jews]... will try to enter and will not be able to." ... Wow! Did you catch that...? "**Many**," not "**some**" — implying that a **majority** of his hearers (who were for the most part Jewish) would **not** make it! ... This was radical teaching! ...It had to have been a stinging slap!

Jews in Jesus' day felt privileged to be part of the covenant community. They had the Law... the prophets... the temple. So they assumed their

salvation was a given. ... But this radical teaching from Jesus was... such thinking is fatal.

How funny that the original hearers of this teaching would have been offended because Jesus said that it wasn't narrow - in the sense that they had **assumed**... but so many of our society today are offended because Jesus says it **is** a narrow way.

Presumption of salvation through privilege continues to delude multitudes in the professing church today. ... And Jesus' statement - "many... will try to enter and will not be able to" - applies today with the same urgency. Jesus does not want to inject false fears into our minds... but He **does** want us to examine our lives... so we will be sure to take the narrow way.

We must **agonize** over being sure to enter the kingdom of God. Salvation must be sought with all that we are.

Some... or perhaps all of you... who strive to be sure that you enter the Kingdom of God... have had to contend with the question of such a narrow path. *"Is it right for us to claim that **we** have the **only** way of salvation...? In light of the fact that there are so many other world religions... doesn't common sense dictate that we must hold onto the possibility that there may be at least one other way... that is right. Christians are simply intolerant of other viewpoints... and that is **not** the way to be in a pluralistic society that we are today. Because we are so intolerant and different than those in our pluralistic culture... we are not only audacious – we're being **foolish**..."* ... Have you ever been assaulted by such thoughts...?

Some men in the church and I have been meeting to read and discuss a book by Paul Copan that delves into such contentions. I would like to take the next few minutes and summarize some of the things we have been learning from Paul Copan's book... which is titled "True for You But Not for Me: Overcoming Objections to Christian faith."

Copan encourages believers who are plagued with this intolerance issue... to question the meaning of the entire concept. What is "tolerance"? Think carefully here... Believe it or not... tolerance really isn't "accepting all views". Many people believe **that** is what tolerance **is**... an acceptance of everyone's views... Islam... Buddhism... (you name it). But those who consider themselves "tolerant" do **not** accept them **all** as true. You don't have to believe they are all 100% true in order for you to be considered "tolerant". ... So what does the word mean? Nearly every formal definition of the concept – "tolerance" – is actually the idea of "putting up with error." A tolerant individual is someone who is willing to put up with error.

It is very important to recognize this... because anyone who thinks they are being tolerant of all views... has to assume the possibility of exclusive truth and error that they are willing to overlook. Think carefully now... IF EXCLUSIVE TRUTH AND ERROR DIDN'T EXIST – THEN TOLERANCE WOULD BE UNNEEDED.

True tolerance grants people the right to dissent. Let me say that again... True tolerance grants people the right to dissent. ... So why is it... that those who **claim** they are the "tolerant ones"... will not allow Christians to dissent from **their** "tolerant" way of thinking...?

Copan writes: “Christians who are criticized for intolerance might ask an accuser, “What do you mean by ‘intolerance’? If he or she says something to the effect that you’re ‘not being accepting of another’s beliefs,’ gently respond, ‘But you likewise are not being accepting of *my* position. You think *I’m* wrong.’”

Truth is inescapable. If anyone tells you that there is no such thing as truth – it is all relative... a matter of a person’s perspective... or it is all a matter of personal opinion... what they are declaring is “It is true that there is no truth”... The very claim that there is no truth – is a contradiction in itself. *“Listen to me... what I am telling you is the truth... ‘There is no such thing as truth!’”* – Huh? And you think Christians are foolish for acknowledging the very platform you are standing on... in order to deny that platform even exists...? ... The very thing you are using... is the very thing you are denying the existence of. ... It is like... if I were to say... “There is no possibility that I am able to speak a single word in English”. ... I just did!

And the view that there is no truth - only opinion... also needs to be challenged... The question needs to be asked - is such a claim true... or just an opinion. “Its all opinion” is not just a matter of opinion; it is a truth claim.

Those who want us to believe that we are foolish to take a stand on what we believe is true - even if it says “this narrow path is true” and “that broad road is wrong” ... they are the ones who defy consistent reason and logic... not us! Truth does exist – and we are designed to be truth-seekers, not truth deniers.

Now let's get back to this morning's text.

Luke 13:25-28

Eventually the narrow door will be slammed shut... either by death... or by the Lord's physical return to Earth. This is going to usher in a great and eternal tragedy... for anyone who has not entered the kingdom.

Two things are shown here that will keep people out of the kingdom. ... The first is... having *no personal relationship* with the Master. ... Twice Jesus issued a categorical denial of relationship: "*I don't know you or where you come from.*" ... This is a total denial despite the fact that they argue, "*We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.*" ... But none who remained outside once the doors were shut... could persuade Christ to say that their **superficial** knowledge of Him had established a relationship. They were strangers.

Some today may argue that they have eaten and drunk with Christ at the Lord's Table... and they have heard his Word preached in His church... and they gave money to feed the poor and keep ministry going at the church. ... This is all very good... but those things do not establish relationship. ... Some who have never missed the Lord's Table and can remember so much of what they heard preached Sunday after Sunday... they will hear him say, "I don't know you or where you come from." ... Even engaging in ministry around the church does not prove relationship.

Mighty works do not save us... but only vital union with Christ... through real faith. ... So the burning question is... does Christ know you? ... Are you in authentic relationship with him?

The secondary question is... which is based on the second thing revealed here as to why many will be surprised and excluded... “Has the relationship with Christ that you claim to have... turned you away from evil? ... Are you morally improved from God's point of view? ... Or will He say, "Away from me you evildoer!"? ... The telling question is not a matter of ministry or standing in the church... but of authentic righteousness... that Christ brings about from deep within you.

“Well... really... what kind of a loving God would send people to Hell...? That seems pretty love-less...” ... But not when you carefully examine it. ... Would a loving God force people into Heaven – even when they refuse to go. ... If a person ignores God and doesn’t want to have anything to do with Him... how loving would God be... if he said... “To bad... you will spend an eternity with me anyway...!”

Imagine how horrifying Jesus' next sentence was to His original hearers: *"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"* (Luke 13:28). ... "Weeping" indicates sorrow... "gnashing of teeth" indicates fierce rage.

Part of this was because of a surprise inclusion.

Luke 13:29-30

Unbelieving Israel will be cast out... but believing Gentiles will sit down with the three highly revered patriarchs... and the redeemed house of Israel. They will not **only be** there — but they will be joyously feasting!

Pride also plays a big part in keeping people out of the Kingdom. Jesus tells His audience that many will not humble themselves before God. ... In their own eyes... they were first... they were preeminent ... they were the most deserving of being included... but in God's eyes... they were last — thus *Gentiles would even come and take their place!*

When sinners fail to answer God's invitation to His feast... they are the ones who are "thrust out" of the joys of the kingdom... and are punished with "weeping and gnashing of teeth" ... It is a picture of people who are overwhelmed with regret... because they see how foolish they were to delay... suddenly it will be too late. ... One of the agonies of hell will be the remembrance of opportunities wasted.

What is the answer? ... "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate!"

Christ's words teach us that the kingdom is narrower than His Jewish hearers thought... because they assumed that all Israel would automatically be included. ... But Jesus said that many of them would not make it through "the narrow door." ... The door's narrowness demands determination. ... Only those who are in relationship with God go through the door.

The narrowness of the kingdom has created a kingdom that is broader than we would ever have thought! ... This is because the narrow way is spiritual and not hereditary... because it is a relationship with God that comes by faith... because it makes men and women new from the inside out... and because it is all by grace.

The narrow way is wide-open to all. Have you entered it? ... If not, Jesus says, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door." It is not too late! But one day it will be.

You enter the Kingdom of God through the Gospel. ... So let me close by explaining the Gospel in a nutshell...

God is perfect. You are not. Mankind declared war on God - sin. God is not corrupt, and convicts us of our crimes against Him. Our crime against a holy God is so severe, it deserves infinite punishment. God is patient, but the door to His eternal Kingdom will eventually shut.

God is gracious, and so He offers forgiveness. God is just, so the punishment must be carried out. God is Jesus, Who lived perfectly, and never offended His Heavenly Father by doing anything wrong. Jesus laid down His life, and endured the justice due against our war on God – He endured the wrath of a just God.

Nothing deserves worship, but God; God demands your worship. He commands you to stop your war against Him (repent) and follow His commands. By your power, you cannot do this. By faith, God reveals Himself to you; by grace He causes you to end your war and freely follow His command to love Him. You have earned nothing good; God has done everything good; He deserves the praise.

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As a Twitter message:

God is holy. You are not. God gives you faith about what Christ has done. You don't deserve this. This is grace. You respond. The result is a new heart filled with Godly desires and eternal life for you and glory to God.

Respond – before the doors are shut.

