

Are Only A Few Being Saved?

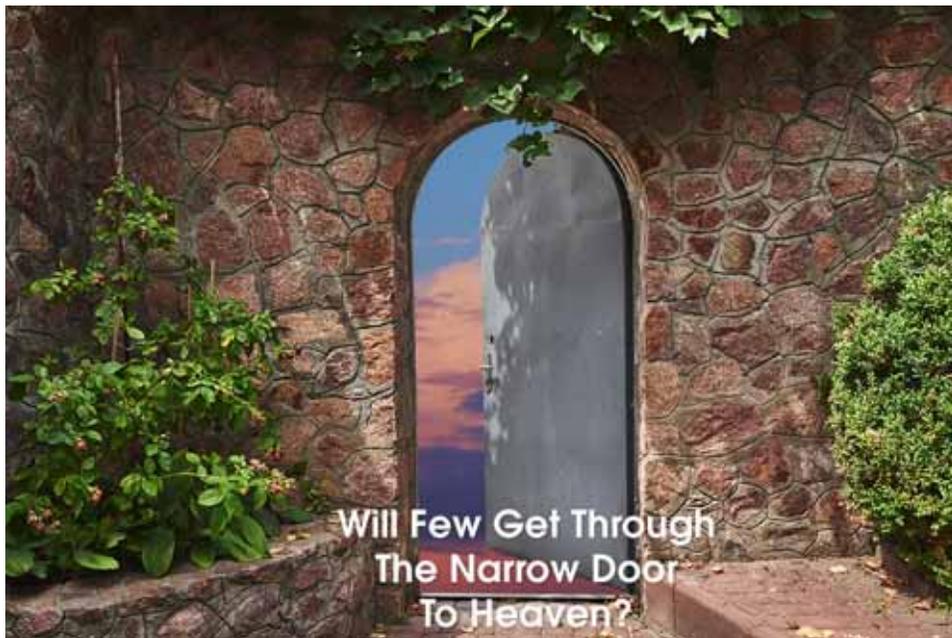
John 10:40 tells us that after Jesus escaped the religious leaders' attempt to murder Him, He left Jerusalem for the other side of the Jordan where John the Baptist had started baptizing people. We do not know how long Jesus remained on the other side of the Jordan River; but when we come to our study, we are told that Jesus was visiting one city after another as He moved back to Jerusalem. In our coming studies in Matthew 19:1-20:34; Mark 10:1-52; Luke 13:22-19:28 and John 11:1-54, we will discover what Christ did while He was away from Jerusalem. We will be given lessons on discipleship, watch Jesus comfort Martha and raise Lazarus from the dead, hear the Sanhedrin Council agree to murder Christ, learn about the healing of ten lepers and Bartimaeus, rejoice that Zaccheus was saved, be given a series of parables and receive instructions about the future, including the second coming of Christ. While outside of Jerusalem, Jesus accomplished much. This study is the first information about what Christ did while in Perea. Our study centers on a question someone asked, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" Jesus will answer the question with a parable. This study comes from Luke 13:22-30.

JUST A FEW ARE BEING SAVED. Our first verse tells us that Jesus was moving from one city and village to another.

And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem.
Luke 13:22 (NASB)

The Greek word for "passing through" is *diaporeuomai*. The word has the sense of passing through an area extensively and thoroughly. This is an excellent example of Scripture not telling us everything. We do not know how many places

He visited or how long He stayed in any of the cities and villages. All that the Holy Spirit has concluded to be important is that Jesus was serious about ministry. He was not lazy and He was thorough. We are told that He was teaching.



What did He teach? While we are not told, it is very likely that His teachings included many of the parables that we have already studied. We know that Jesus repeated the parable of the Mustard Seed and Leaven. Both parables are recorded in Christ's sermon about the Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:31-35) which were given in the early part of A.D. 32. It is now late A.D. 32. He has just recently repeated these two parables in Luke 13:19-21. How many other parables did He repeat? Did He repeat the Sermon on the Mount or the Olivet Discourse? The gospels do not tell us everything because they are focused on that which is important for us

to know and understand. God never intended for us to spend all of our time speculating. Instead, He wants us to be preaching the good news about salvation, which is most likely what Jesus did in every city and village as He made His

way back to Jerusalem.

Then we are told that someone wanted to know how many people were being saved.

And someone said to Him, “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?” Luke 13:23a (NASB)

The word for “saved” is *sozo*. The word is a present, passive participle. The participle refers to continuing action which means they wanted to know how many would continue to be saved. It would be difficult for us to answer, but not for Jesus.

N A R R O W DOOR IS HARD TO ENTER. Jesus’ answer is similar to the parable of the Narrow and Wide Gates that is recorded in the Sermon on the Mount given about one year earlier in the last part of the year A.D. 31.

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.” Luke 13:23b-24 (NASB)

On this occasion Jesus refers to a narrow door of a house and tells whoever asked the question that many will try to enter through the door. The Greek word for “strive” is an important word. It means more than the English word strive. The Greek word is *agonizomai*. We get our word “to agonize” from this word. The word was used to describe con-

tests in the gymnastic games (1 Corinthians 9:25); to fight, a fight with adversaries (John 18:36; 2 Timothy 4:7) or to be involved in strenuous effort (Colossians 4:12). The picture that Jesus paints is of someone very seriously agonizing to get through the door of the house. The door is extremely narrow. Only a few are able to squeeze through.

We will discover soon that Jesus’ illustration is about how a person is saved and is able to go to heaven. It may surprise some Christians that throughout Jesus’ ministry, He repeat-

edly teaches that salvation is not easily obtained. Salvation requires serious effort. In the parable of the Narrow and Wide Roads (Matthew 7:13-14), He said that few find the narrow road that leads to eternal life. In John 6:27 Jesus tells us that we must work, *ergomozai*, in order to enter into eternal life. Hebrews 4:11 encourages us to give intense effort in order to obtain salvation. Jesus’ message was that gaining eternal life is not easy and simple. Not

everyone is going to go to heaven and see God. Only a few will get there!

In Matthew 10:37-39, Jesus said that he who loves father or mother more than Him “is not worthy of Me.” He did not mean that it was wrong to love our parents. His message is that He must be the priority in our lives. In verses 38-39 He added,

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not



worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:38-39 (NASB)

His message of self-denial is required. In Matthew 12:49-50 Jesus tells us that those who are true disciples are those who do “the will of the Father who is in heaven.” In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus repeated the same message when He said those who do not do the will of the Father in heaven are lawless and will not enter heaven. Again in Matthew 16:24-26, Jesus taught that we must deny ourselves if we want to go to heaven.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Matthew 16:24-26 (NASB)

The common theme to these statements about salvation is that self-denial and submission to Christ is required. This is the same message that Christ sent the rich, young ruler (Matthew 19:21-22). The man’s real problem was his unwillingness to submit and admit that he could not earn his way into heaven.

The phrase, “the first shall be last and the last shall be first,” makes the point that heaven is not for the proud but for the humble. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus gave us an illustration of a tax-collector and a Pharisee. The Pharisee was proud, but the tax-collector was repentant and pleaded for forgiveness. Jesus said the tax-collector was justified because he had humbled himself.

In Romans 10:9 we are promised that if we confess Christ as our Lord and believe that He can and will forgive our sins, we will be saved. John 3:16 declares we must believe in Christ in order to have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NASB)

It is important to notice that this verse is about humility too! Most people think that they must earn their way into heaven. In fact, most want to earn their way into heaven. Most people think they can earn their way into heaven because proudly they believe they are good people. Many when asked if they are going to heaven say, “Yes, because I am a good person.” But God tells us in Romans 3:10-12 that none of us are good.

That is, none of us do anything “good” enough to earn heaven. In Mathew 5:3 Jesus tell us only the “poor in spirit” will go to heaven.

True faith includes humility: repentance and submission.

That is, only those who humbly see themselves as spiritual beggars will go to heaven. The proud do not seek God, plead and beg. They think they are good enough to go to heaven. But humble people admit their sins and beg God to forgive them. Humility is the response of a person who sees his or her sins and understands they desperately need their sins to be forgiven. They respond this way because they believe only Christ can forgive them. They realize that unless God forgives them, they are going to suffer eternal punishment in hell. The proud do not see any such need to be forgiven. They are indifferent and comfortable in their condition.

Jesus is not telling us that we must do some work in order to go to heaven and be with God. Romans 4:3 and Ephesians 2:8-10 clearly teach that salvation is not by works. It is by God’s grace through faith that we are saved. Jesus repeatedly described the response of a believing heart which responds to the work of God in the hearts of men and women (John

6:65, 44, 37; Ephesians 1:4-6). Therefore, when Jesus said, "Strive to enter through the narrow door," He was referring to the fact that true humility is rare! It is the work of God in the heart of men and women.

... Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Luke 13:23b-24 (NASB)

True humility is impossible without the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). It is God's work in the heart. This means that the humble, believing heart responds in true repentance and humble submission to Christ. The characteristic of the humbling work of the Holy Spirit is a true faith that involuntarily repents and submits. This is rare!

Yet, many will try to enter by their own works (Matthew 7:21-23). The proud are confident in themselves and what they can do. The proud do not see any need to pray, but the humble do. The rich, young ruler is a good example.

He asked, "What must I do to obtain eternal life?" Many try to enter heaven by doing good works, but Jesus warns they will not be able to do it.

PARABLE ABOUT WHO ENTERS THE KINGDOM. The parable now shifts to the end of the age and then takes a twist when He reveals that the parable is actually about them. He describes how they will respond in the future.

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." Luke 13:25 (NASB)

We are told the door has been shut by the head of the house. The people who are hearing the parable are the ones who are standing outside. They will not be able to get in. The opportunity to enter heaven existed then. Jesus warned them that

later they will want to enter the kingdom, but then it will be too late. 2 Corinthians 6:2 warns us that now, here in this life, is the time to believe in Christ and seek to have our sins forgiven.

Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION" 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NASB)

In the account of the beggar called Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31, we are told that after death no one can cross over from hell into heaven, or from heaven into hell. We are told that there is a great chasm and the distance is fixed. No one can change their destiny. If we fail to believe in Christ in this life, then we will dwell in hell for eternity. Hebrews 9:27 is a frightening verse.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment . . . Hebrews 9:27 (NASB)

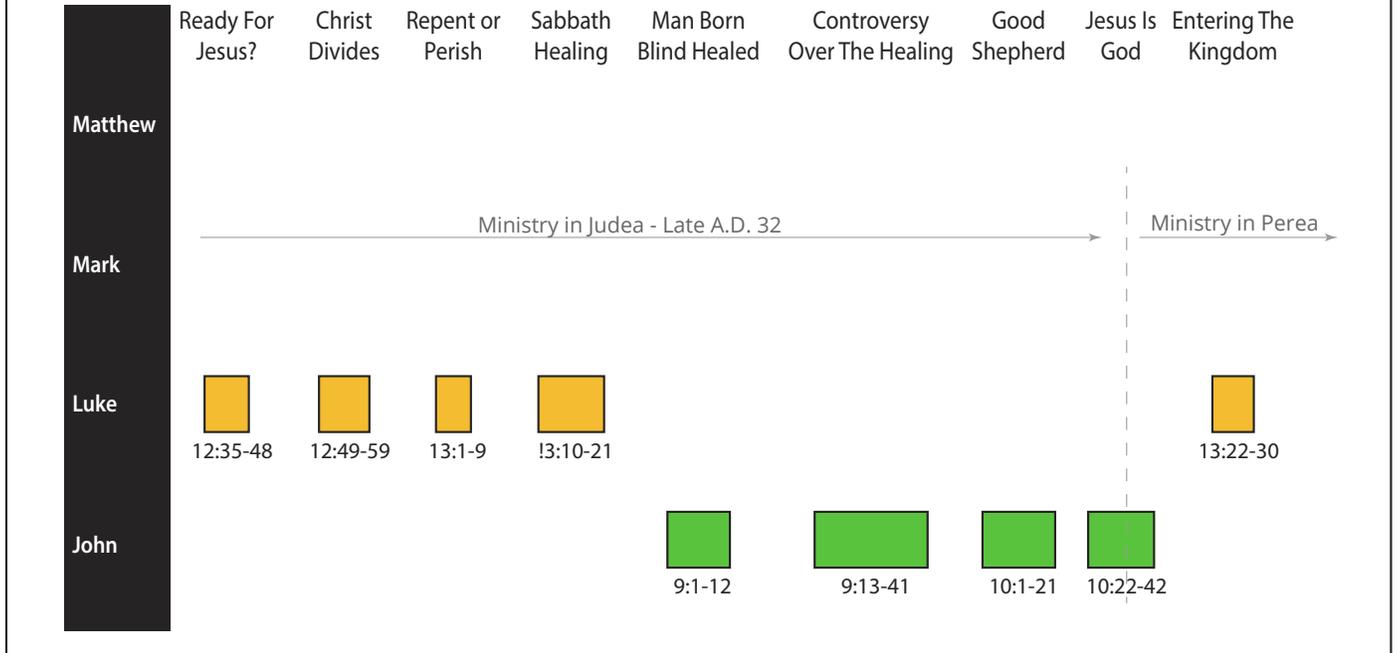
Eventually, they knew He died on the cross, and some heard that He was resurrected but they will still go to hell.

The decision one makes in this life determines one's

destiny. We discovered in Luke 12:20, 40 and 58 that life is short and the decision we make must be made quickly. In verse 20 Jesus warned, "This very night your soul is required of you" and in verse 40, "You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

But Jesus' parable, which becomes real-life in Luke 13:22-30, tells us that when the door to the kingdom is shut, no one will be able to get in. Only Christians will enter the kingdom. Everyone else will be in hell. Then in verse 28, we discover that Jesus is describing those who enter the kingdom and those who will not be able to enter. Those who, because of pride, will try to squeeze through the door will find the door shut and then it is too late. Where are you? Do you believe in Christ and not yourself? If you have believed in Christ and not your good works for the forgiveness of your sins and entrance into heaven, then you have entered through the door. If you are thinking about trusting Christ,

Life and Heart of Jesus



then pray that the door does not close.

Then Jesus says that after the door is shut, some of the very individuals listening to Him will ask to be allowed in. But He will reply, "I do not know where you are from!" Now notice that Jesus says, "Then you will begin to say . . ."

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." Luke 13:26-27 (NASB)

This is very personal. He was talking directly to them when He said that some individuals in the crowd had shared a meal with Him and heard Him teach in the streets. They were just like some today who attend church and hear a wonderful sermon about Christ. But that did not make any of them a believer, a follower of Christ. Christ makes that clear when He said, "I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS." That stunning statement reveals that they were going to hell.

We are discovering an important truth that is missed

sometimes from this passage. Notice these people had heard Jesus teach and they knew or believed Christ existed. Eventually, they knew He died on the cross, and some heard that He was resurrected, but they will still go to hell. This means it is not enough to believe that Christ lived, died, and was resurrected because Jesus will tell them at the judgment, "I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS." This reveals that good works do not save anyone.

Earlier in the year of A.D. 32, Jesus stated that at the judgment many will try to get into heaven by reviewing all the ministry that they performed in Christ's name.

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." Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB)

This illustration is the scariest statement in the Bible except for descriptions about hell. It is scary because these individuals thought they were Christians who were going to heaven. They may even be individuals who had dedicated their whole lives to God. At an annual, nationally well-known pastor's conference, it is not uncommon for some pastors to discover that they are going to hell and choose to become a Christian for the first time. How many laymen think they are going to heaven because they said a prayer? They believed in Christ, but their faith was vain faith (1 Corinthians 15:2). Our study in Matthew 7:21-23 reveals that some who think they are Christians did not actually squeeze through the door and get into heaven. They never had real faith.

CONSEQUENCES OF UNBELIEF. Then Jesus declared the tragic consequences of empty faith in Christ.

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. Luke 13:28 (NASB)

Jesus' message is very clear. These individuals were not going to enter the kingdom. It is important to realize that at the Goat and Sheep Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus will tell us that only Christians will enter the kingdom. It is important to note that the passage helps identify a true Christian from those who are not Christians. Revelation 19:11-14 tells us that all the Christians since the cross will come with Christ at His Second Coming. The first part of Revelation 20:4 refers to "they sat on them, and judgment was given to them." This refers to the Old Testament saints who will be resurrected and enter the kingdom.

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. Revelation 20:4 (NASB)

Apparently Luke 13:28 describes both the Goat and Sheep Judgment and the anguish of those who will be in hell and see others going into the kingdom. In order to live in the eternal heaven (Revelation 21-22), a person must have lived in the kingdom.

Those who reject Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, end up in hell and truly suffer (Matthew 8:12, 22, 29; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Mark 9:43-44; James 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4). Hell is fiery torment day and night which will last forever.

BLESSING OF TRUE FAITH. Then Jesus describes those who came through the narrow door. As we have already discovered, these are those who humbly believed. The mark of true faith is humility which includes repentance and submission to Christ. They will eat and drink and celebrate in the kingdom.

And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. Luke 13:29 (NASB)

During the last supper that Christ had with the disciples, He said that they would all, except for Judas, eat and drink in the kingdom (Luke 22:16, 30). Prior to the last supper, He had spoken of eating and drinking in the kingdom (Matthew 8:11-12; Luke 14:15; 22:29-30; Revelation 19:9). The kingdom is real. Every Old and New Testament believer will celebrate Christ's reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

CONCLUSION. Christ's closing comment is directed at the Jews who believed they were going to have eternal life because they were descendants of Abraham (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:39-40). Earlier in Luke 3:8 Jesus warned them that they needed to repent if they wanted to go to heaven.

Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. Luke 3:8 (NASB)

But the Pharisees officially rejected Christ. Therefore, Christ's closing comment was that some who think they are first will be last. John 12:42 states that many of the rulers of Israel did believe in Christ. Consequently, He directed this at them.

And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first

who will be last. Luke 13:30 (NASB)

Since some of the religious leaders or rulers failed to repent of their sins and believe in Christ, they were going to hell. That is, some who think they are first will actually be last.

Galatians 3:28-29 gives us the principle that among Christians, no one is first or last.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:28-29 (NASB)

But what a disappointment this would be to Jews at the time of Christ. All who believe in Christ are equal. Jews and Gentiles are equal in heaven and anyone who believes in Christ is a spiritual descendant of Abraham. We can praise the Lord that salvation is equally free to Jews and Gentiles.

How does one go to heaven? A person becomes a Christian when one truly understands that one is going to hell because they commit sins. They realize that only Christ can forgive their sins, and they want to be forgiven. True faith in Christ produces humility, which evidences itself in repentance and submission to Christ in response to understanding the Christ did everything necessary to forgive one's sins. Are you going to heaven or hell?