

ARE THERE FEW THAT BE SAVED? (2)

March 17, 2019

Luke 18:1-34

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Luke 13:24

In this exhortation Christ used a term from the world of wrestling, where a combatant struggles against his opponent. Our English word “agonize” comes from the Greek word “strive.” Those who will enter God’s heaven are those who “strive to enter in at the strait (narrow) gate.” But they do not enter heaven by their striving.

Scripture presents everlasting life as a gift from God; of such value that no worth can be assessed, neither in possessions nor in deeds. Even if it were susceptible to value-assessment, mankind is disqualified from entering by his nature and his deeds, both of which are sinful, and show him to be God’s enemy.

When Christ said “strive to enter in at the strait gate,” he was describing the character and demeanor of those who will enter heaven. He was exhorting careless souls to strive, to recognize the seriousness of the matter, to agonize in determination to enter. But they do not enter because they strive. They strive because they recognize and esteem the worth of what they will receive—and especially, their utter unworthiness. Moreover, keeping with Christ’s meaning, they strive because they recognize that very few will be saved.

Their striving looks like this:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:1-3).

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (I John 2:15-17).

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I

have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:7-14).

Consider these examples from Scripture. Three times in Luke 18, Jesus named people who will not be in heaven; people who did not “strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

The first (9-14) was a very religious man. He prayed publicly, and loudly. Hearing him, one would conclude that his religion was demanding, that he had given up ungodly, unjust behavior; that he subdued his lust and greed, and was strict in religious fasting, and in tithing. Contrasting himself with another man who was in the temple praying, he was satisfied with his righteous life. But Christ affirmed that the man was not destined for heaven. Thus, he did not “strive to enter in at the strait gate.” He loved his self-assessed righteousness, heedless of his need for repentance. Striving to enter heaven is renouncing your own righteousness.

A second example (15-17) involved the disciples rebuking people who brought their little children to Jesus, little ones who had no power or significance add to to the kingdom Jesus would establish. But Jesus rebuked the disciples, welcomed the children, and let the disciples know that only those who become as little children will enter heaven. The disciples, and all others, needed to learn to eschew reputation and status among men, to renounce their own pride, for this is the demeanor of those who “strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

Third (18-24), a reputable, rich young man asked Jesus, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus cited the Ten Commandments, which the inquirer affirmed that he had kept. Jesus continued, “Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! (22-24). Giving his wealth would not save him. But love of wealth kept him from receiving and obeying Christ. He loved his riches more than Christ. Therein he refused to “strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

The gospels report that Mary, Lazarus’ sister, was present in Bethany at a feast prepared for Jesus, Lazarus and the disciples in the home of Simon, a leper whom Jesus had healed. This was only days before Jesus’ crucifixion. Mary broke open a valuable container filled with very expensive perfume, and anointed Jesus body with it. The disciples faulted her, citing the great value of the ointment and the use it could have served selling it and giving the money given to the poor. Jesus rebuked them, commended Mary and announced that she was motivated by anticipation of His impending death: opportunity for such display of love was passing quickly. So lavish a gift was well-suited to the Savior of mankind, who would soon pour out His life and spill His blood, even as she had poured expensive perfume upon Him.

When it came to Christ, nothing else was of value to Mary, neither the ointment, its container, nor the approval of the gathered disciples. She knew that only Christ matters, and that He soon would be gone from them. Time was short for her to pour out her life unto Him. She practiced His exhortation, “strive to enter in at the strait gate.”

“Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are” (Luke 13: 12, 24).