



Brad Jury – State Minister
480 S. Hempstead Road, Westerville, OH 43081
(614) 899-7317
Brad.Jury@CapitolCom.org

The Knock at the Door

It is nearly impossible to describe the breadth of God's mercy and the depths of His grace. Even under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the authors of Scripture still end up without enough words to describe the fathomless love of God toward mankind. Jesus is the perfect representation of all that God desires for people to know about His purpose to redeem the human race from the curse of sin.

Yet in His rich mercy toward us, God is unbending in one key truth that we all must reconcile and submit to. In His plan for redemption there is only one way to come to peace with God, and there will be an end to the opportunity to receive His pardon.

²² And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³ 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!*'" *Luke 13:22-35 NKJV*

"Lord, are there few who are saved?." This question is a legitimate and insightful question! Apparently one of those who were following Christ witnessed diseases healed and demons banished, but this person perceived that there was still a lack of repentant faith among the people of Israel. The religious leaders, the ones who were supposed to lead in a religious revival, were denying the Messianic claims of Christ and His offer of salvation. This follower was perceptive to see that many still had not experienced the inward healing of forgiving grace and was stunned to see that anyone would reject this Messiah. Recalling prophecies, it seemed that the turning to the Messiah would be a nationwide movement, but this didn't appear to be happening. So his confusion was understandable. More people were rejecting the Messianic claims of Christ than believing on Him.

Christ, the masterful teacher, knew at the heart of this question lay a deeper truth that needed to be addressed to bring clarity to the confusion. Christ said many *want* to enter into God's kingdom but will *not* because of their lack of "striving." At first sound this seems like a works-based Gospel—contrary to the grace-filled, faith-based offer that Christ had been putting before them to believe. Christ had thus far been adamant that the keeping of the law (*which no-one could do perfectly*) was not the way to enter into the kingdom of heaven. So what did He mean by saying that many want to be saved, but that they will not?

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At the heart of many Jews was that, even in the midst of their dried up rituals, when the Messiah appeared their salvation would be “national.” They had exchanged personal faith for nationalistic identity. They had deceived themselves into thinking that God would not find them in the crowd but would sweep Israel up into a bountiful kingdom of the Messiah, notwithstanding their individual accountability. They wanted the benefits of God’s grace without a personal, individual reckoning of their sinfulness.

Christ said they must “strive” for the kingdom, for salvation. “Strive” is derived from the word for “agony” especially used in the realm of athletics. It means to fight—even hand-to-hand. **Those who would find their way in through the only door (Jesus Christ) to God would have to come *in spite* of their efforts!** They would, literally, have to battle themselves. Each soul would have to do battle with the belief that he was perfect before God, and that salvation was wholly dependent upon His promised mercy and not his own works. This would take desperate effort on the behalf of the one who truly wanted to be saved. **Those who will be saved must understand that they need to be saved from the un-fulfillment of themselves and from the just wrath of God against them.**

The “easy-ride” on the “coat-tails” of a nationalistic assumption had numbed the souls of so many who sought after God for their entrance into the kingdom. “We are of Abraham!” they reasoned. But with piercing clarity Christ said that wasn’t enough. They must enter in, not through Abraham--their father, but through Jesus--the Son of God. Others outside of Israel, as far reaching as the four points of the compass, will enter the kingdom of God, but so many of Israel will not be welcomed but “thrust out.”

They wanted salvation, but not God. They wanted pardon, but not at the cost of their self-righteousness. **The Gospel is, in many ways, “counter-intuitive.”** Those who *work* for their salvation will not receive it. Those who *agonize* against their own notions of righteousness will find the mercy of God a place of rest. **The “striving” that Christ is speaking of is not that of self-reliance, but actually, self-denial.**

Just in case they missed the point of the “striving” Christ was speaking of He said, “And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”

³⁰ No one who enters the kingdom of God will have boasting rights about their self-admission through the door. Once you are in the kingdom you have the right perspective: it was all about Him and His abounding grace. Salvation, entrance into the kingdom of God, is all about faith in the grace of God expressed through humble repentance and heart-felt acknowledgement of His Lordship.

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. In what ways is the gate to God’s kingdom “narrow”? (v. 24)
2. Why are there so many who will stand outside of the door when it is eventually closed by the sovereign Lord? (v. 25)
3. What does Christ mean when He uses the word “agony” to express the attitude of the one who enters His kingdom? Is it about self-reliance? (v. 24)
4. What is the danger of being so exposed to Christ and yet not acknowledging Him as Savior? (see vv. 26-27)
5. Is it possible to look and act like a Christian and really not be a follower of Christ? (see vv. 26-27)
6. Why can’t God just “bend the rules” a little to make the way to heaven “broad”?
7. What glorious truth of God’s grace is there to find that the way is “narrow”?
8. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?
9. How has this lesson encouraged your walk with Christ today?