

STRIVING TO ENTER

"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)

During the personal ministry of Jesus some one came to Him and said, "Lord are there few that be saved?" (Luke 13:23) Just who this was we are not able to know. It could have been one of His disciples, or it could have been one among the Jews seeking to perplex the Lord, or else involve Him in a controversy with the Pharisees. Nevertheless whoever asked it presented a very challenging question.

It was a prevalent opinion among the Jews that few would enter heaven. Since but two of all the host of men above twenty years of age who came out of Egypt entered Canaan, so among the Jews prevailed the idea that a proportionally small number would enter heaven. So on this subject the querist wished the opinion of Jesus. But Jesus did not feel disposed to satisfy the idle curiosity of this querist. The answer to this question would have done little good. So the Savior's answer shows that it is far more important for one to work out his own salvation than to engage in idle questions and vain speculations about who will or will not go to heaven. He closes the matter by the words of the text in which he warns of the difficulty of entering into heaven, the home of the soul.

In reading the Scriptures we are impressed with these two thoughts: How easy it is to be lost and how hard it is to be saved. Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matthew 7:13-14) Ancient cities were surrounded by walls and entered through gates. Some of these broad roads leading into them admitted multitudes. Some were entered by narrow roads and gates that admitted only a few. So it is in the path to heaven--it is narrow, not many travel in it. Yet God would "have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) Furthermore God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9)

It takes a long time for some people to learn anything. For three and one half years Jesus had tried to teach His disciples what the kingdom was to be like which He was to establish. Over and over He said, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto." Yet the apostles and other Jews were looking for a restoration of the kingdom of David, in which only the chosen of Israel could enter. So Jesus utters the words of the text showing the difficulty of entering and remaining in the kingdom of God; that the kingdom of God is not one of pomp and earthly glory, but one of service and sacrifice.

"STRIVE"

The very first word of our text suggests the idea of intense effort and earnest endeavor. Webster gives this definition of "Strive": "To make efforts; to use exertions; to endeavor with earnestness; to labor hard; to struggle in opposition." Hence Jesus teaches that we must "Strive, make efforts, use exertions, endeavor with earnestness, labor hard, struggle, to enter in at the strait gate." Goodspeed renders this passage in these words: "You must strain every nerve to get in through the narrow door." Do these fervent words describe the attitude and the actions of the average Christian today as regarding the matter of going to heaven?

It is an interesting and profitable study to note the use of the word "strive" in the Scriptures. It is used to mean "to contend or strive as an athlete strives to be a champion." This use of the word is found in this passage: "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." (I Corinthians 9:25) And again, "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." (II Timothy 2:5)

The word "strive" is also used in the Bible to mean "to contend against as against sin." In this sense Paul uses the word in this passage: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." (Hebrews 12:4)

The word "strive" is also used in the New Testament to mean "to labor." Paul uses the word in this sense when he said to the Roman brethren, "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." (Romans 15:20) Again to the Philippian church, Paul said, "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." (Philippians 1:27)

Again the word "strive" is used in the Scriptures to mean "to agonize; to endeavor with strenuous zeal, striving to obtain something." The Greek words for "strive" and "agony" are from the same root word. The word "strive" is from the word "agonizomai" and the word "agony" is from the word "agonia." The word "agony" or "agonia" is found but one time in the Bible, in Luke 22:44, which reads as follows: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Here the gospel writer expresses the severe mental and emotional struggle, the agony and anguish of body and spirit which Jesus experienced in Gethsemane. Does this picture the way that we "strive" to enter heaven? As Jesus was earnestly absorbed in the one task of redeeming the world, so should we exert every power and energy of body and soul in the effort to enter the home of the soul. In other words, we should let the salvation of our souls be the grand business of our lives.

In the words of Jesus, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:34)

We must take up the cross of Christ and follow Him. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23) Again the Master said, "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:38) Many would enter in without the agony and striving. Many would wear the crown if they could follow without bearing the cross. But before there can be crown wearing there must also be cross bearing.

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me."

The athlete in a race receives the prize only by persistent training. But suppose that he does not train, can he expect to win the prize? Jesus is our Example--He had to bear His cross. But what came after the cross experience? He was then crowned. Paul said, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." (Philippians 2:8-9)

"THE STRAIT GATE"

This word "strait" is not "straight"--the shortest distance between two points; but "strait," which according to Webster means "narrow, difficult, strict." Therefore entrance into heaven is preceded by entrance into a "strait", "narrow" and "strict" gate. To the Jewish mind a gate was, metaphorically, the entrance or the introduction into anything. Any duty that God has enjoined upon us becomes a gate through which we must pass, and our salvation depends upon it. Jesus said, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14) You may take the Gate of Faith, this is difficult for some, yet we must enter it if we would be saved. Jesus said, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24) Paul said, "but without faith it is impossible to please him." (Hebrews 11:6) The Gate of Repentance is an extremely difficult one for many. Many are so wedded to their own passions and lusts to them this gate is closed. Yet it must be entered if we enter the kingdom. Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) Paul declares that God "commandeth all men every where to repent." (Acts 17:3) The Gate of Confession--the duty of confessing the name of Christ among men is hard for some. Jesus promises this: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32) Yet because of timidity or fear some dread this duty. The Gate of Baptism is one at which many falter.

Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16) Many profess to believe, but see no necessity in being baptized. Yet the same Lord that commanded belief also commanded baptism. Again He said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) The Gate of Forgiveness is tremendously difficult for many to enter. Yet Jesus our Model, forgave those enemies who were taking His life, and said to His Father, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15) The Gate of the Golden Rule is one great difficulty with the world at large. Jesus said, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12) The world says, "Get to him before he gets to you," but Jesus says "Treat him as you yourself would like to be treated." Everyone of the Beatitudes of Jesus is dependent upon entering a gate; upon performing a duty. Yet every duty that God enjoins upon us is not unreasonable. Paul said, "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." (Romans 12:1) And John said, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3)

" MANY WILL SEEK TO ENTER IN AND SHALL NOT BE ABLE"

And why? Because they seek half heartedly. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30) They seek, but they do not "strive" or "agonize" to enter in. The Lord has said, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13) Nothing short of this will enable us to find God.

Many shall not enter in because they endeavor to seek in the wrong way--that is, in their own way. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) Therefore if I would enter heaven at last I must do the will of heaven while I live upon the earth.

Many will not enter in because they seek too late. David said, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee." (Psalms 63:1) They will come at a time when the door is shut, when it will be too late to obtain mercy. In this life they neglect their duty and concern themselves about other matters. Hence at the judgment they will seek to enter in, but it will be too late.

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May we strive to enter in at the strait gate, for truly the entrance into the celestial city, the home of the soul, is worthy of every effort and sacrifice that we put forth. Enter in today, for the day of grace will be lengthened out, and it will be too late then to enter in. For when death comes the day of mercy will be past, and the door of heaven will be barred against you forever and forever. How important, then, it is to strive to enter in while we have the opportunity, and before it shall be too late.

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