

We live in the midst of the “American Paradox” where we’ve never had so much, and never had so little. Our successes have led us to entitlement, onto which we have projected our view of God. Thus, for our culture, God exists to give me the things that make me happy and to make me feel good about myself. He is our Concierge and our Therapist, but He would never make demands upon me of any moral significance and would never judge me. We have looked inward to find salvation and life, centering our lives internally upon the Self, rather than on the objective, external God. If God is “out there”, then the only way I know Him is “in here” where nobody can tell me what’s right or wrong, good or bad, evil or holy. And when God is removed as the sun at the center of the solar system of our lives, a center outside of ourselves, external to us, the Self moves in to take the center of our orbits. Yet, if we were to place the earth at the center of the solar system, the results would be disastrous, with the planets of our lives smashing into each other and falling into themselves with ferocious cataclysmic destruction. It is the same with our souls.

Ironically, while the seeds of the 1960’s bring the fullness of its fruit today in this self-centered view of a God who serves us and makes no demands, the other side of the paradox is that having so much we also seem to be ruled by a depression unseen before, an emptiness of life, a hollow pervasive rumble of boredom and listlessness. We now live in a generation of kids who have been told they can be whatever they want to be and have resourced them with technology and education unparalleled in the history of the world, but they don’t know what they want to be. They are unhappy and cannot pinpoint why. As David Wells puts it, “Their self-esteem is high, but their self is empty...They are more connected to more people through the internet, and yet they have never felt more lonely. They want to be accepted, and yet so often feel alienated. Never have we had so much; never have had so little. That is our paradox.”

It is into this world, also, that Jesus speaks of a table at which to feast with a litany of brothers and sisters, of great men and women honored and revered; a family created and beloved by God at which angels long to look. It is a glorious scene of belonging, acceptance, and intimacy. This table is God’s table. Yet, as you pan out from this table the equal glories of the terrible truth are revealed: not everyone is at the table. Some are outside, who refused to come in and dine while the door was open, and now it is shut...forever excluded from the table of God. Jesus commands and pleads with us to enter today while the door is open, make every effort to get through the narrow door because a day is coming when it will be shut and your familiarity with this Jesus will not suffice as entering the door.

And this all begins with the type of question that is not uncommon today, with more than a hint of dissent and disdain that God would ever say ‘no’ to anyone, for our culture believes that the boundaries between right and wrong, heaven and hell, your religion and my religion are disappearing. Transcendence has been swallowed up by immanence, and God is only found within my own heart. Any hint of exclusion, or boundaries, or judgment are met with intolerant and appalled anathema that charges such claims with intolerant bigotry: “How can you say that God will treat some differently than others?”

Yet, this is exactly what Jesus teaches. Those who come through the narrow door are included. Those who refuse to enter the narrow door while it is open will find themselves outside when it is closed. Yet what He did to open that door is deep, deep and marvelous grace.

1. The Question: "Will only a few be saved?"
  - a. Then asks a fairly removed question, asked in an impersonal way "will many".
    - i. Theoretical and speculative
    - ii. It is possible that this was a genuine question, but the way in which Jesus answers it would lead me to believe that the question has a note of denigration: "Will *only* a few..."
      1. "How come only a few, Jesus?"
      2. To state it indicatively: "God is not so narrow as to only save a few. You are narrow, too, Jesus, if you say that only certain people get into the kingdom."
  - b. Jesus, however, makes His answer very personal to the people surrounding Him: "YOU strive to enter through the narrow door."
    - i. Whatever the number of those saved, what should really concern you is whether or not you are saved!
      1. This is a plural "you", so Jesus is addressing the entire crowd
    - ii. BECAUSE
      1. Many will seek to enter it, but will not be able.
      2. When the Master of the house has "risen" and shut the door and you then address Him "Lord, let us in" He will not recognize you as friend.
      3. You may claim to have eaten with Him and heard Him teach in your streets, but He will not know you once the door is shut and you find yourself outside
  - c. The man addresses Jesus as "Lord"
    - i. So do those outside the door when it closes!
    - ii. Jesus is being very, very personal with this crowd
2. The Door is Narrow
  - a. The door is so narrow that it is to be "strived" toward
    - i. Entering the Kingdom is costly, not easy
      1. This is one of the central teachings of Jesus regarding the Kingdom that our society is very uncomfortable with, maybe even you are
      2. We like to think of God as "owing" us life, as being our great delivery man in the sky, and one who blesses us with things
        - a. "[American Millenials] see God as not demanding much from them because he is chiefly engaged in solving their problems and make them feel good. Religion is about experiencing happiness, contentedness, having god solve one's problems and provide stuff like homes, the internet, iPods, iPads, and iPhones." (David Wells)
        - b. Joel Osteen has made hundreds of millions of dollars selling this view that God really, really, wants you to have your best life now, you just have to reach out and take it, but holiness is not important
      3. The reality is that God does not call us to look inward to find our felt needs and meet them, but he calls us outward, to see Him, and to strive with every fiber of our being to know Him in whose presence is the fullness of joy, the way we were made to be
    - ii. It is free for you to enter, but one must strive to enter through the door
      1. What is this "striving?"
      2. It is not to strive to do good works, but it is the costly dying process of repentant faith, which is not easy
        - a. It is not easy to give up control, to fall on your face, to admit that you are incapable and in desperate need of rescue.
        - b. It is not easy to bear up the shame of Jesus, to be hated for His sake, to be mocked and ridiculed and murdered by the world because of Him
        - c. It is not easy to admit that salvation is only found outside of yourself and that you are broken, that there is only one door and you're not it!

- iii. It is those who are willing to accept the cost of humility, dying to one's self, *because the glory of knowing and submitting and loving Him is more glorious than avoiding the squeeze.*
  - 1. To not go through the narrow door of Christ because of its cost, to trust in your own power and performance instead of His, to follow your own wisdom rather than His Word, and to rely upon your own goodness rather than His grace is like a baby refusing to leave the warm comfort of the womb and come into the light because of the travails of the travel.
    - a. It may be a difficult journey, but Life awaits in the Light, maturity and glory that is far superior than existence in the warm darkness of the womb
    - b. To love the darkness more than the light, because of the cost of squeezing through the narrow door, leads only to death in the darkness
  - 2. While it is true, like we saw two weeks ago, that the Spirit compels us into the light, it is also true that nobody comes to the light except through the narrow door
    - a. And the Spirit does not work without us! He compels us with new life, bearing us up, but it is a regeneration to new life that chooses life
    - b. Thus, nobody born again refuses to enter through the narrow door, rather they joyfully fall upon Christ with new eyes to see both the glories of God and the inadequate righteousness of their own
- iv. 1 Tim 4:10
  - 1. We labor and strive towards what we place our hope in
    - a. On the Living God
    - b. Who is every salvation
      - i. Especially of those who believe
  - 2. IMPORTANT: The issue is not the *perfection* of our striving, but the direction of our striving – are we striving toward the right door?
    - a. Is our hope in the door, which is Christ?
    - b. Or, is our hope in our own way in?
      - i. Our righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, perfection, abilities, or even our own faith?
      - ii. Or, is our hope in that God will just look past everything and always keep the door open?
      - iii. Is salvation external and objective (outside of ourselves), or is it internal and subjective (coming from within)?
  - 3. Fight to hope in the Living God alone; Struggle to entrust yourself to Him
    - a. It is a struggle, faith is not simple, nor does Jesus demand its perfection
    - b. He demands its direction upon Him – through the narrow door
- b. It is the only door – the exclusivity of Jesus
  - i. John 10:7-9; 14:6
  - ii. Romans 5:2 – “through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God”
  - iii. Eph 2:18; 3:12 – we have confident access to the Father “through Him”
  - iv. Heb 10:19 – “we have confidence to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus”
- c. The knob is only on the inside
  - i. It is open to be “squeezed” through, but God has the door open now
  - ii. The Master of the House controls the door
    - 1. It is open and you are invited through now!
      - a. You don't have to find the handle or achieve some secret password or handshake – make every effort to trust in Jesus now!
    - 2. When He opens it, it remains open
    - 3. When He closes it, it remains closed

### 3. The Door Will be Shut

- a. "Master of the House" will close the door
  - i. It is clear that the "Master of the House" is Jesus
    1. "We ate with you" and "we listened to your teaching"
  - ii. Jesus will judge whom He knows and belongs inside the house and whom He doesn't know and belongs outside the covenant blessings of God
- b. God is patient now, but one day his patience will come to an end
  - i. This is the great tragedy of this parable: many will seek to enter on that day, but the door will be closed
  - ii. One day everyone will come to the realization that the promises made in Christ to the prophets and the patriarchs are true, but the opportunity to enter the Wedding Feast will be over
  - iii. In fact, this would have brought to mind Noah's ark
- c. Entrance to the Kingdom is not based upon familiarity with Jesus, a knowledge of His teachings, or even an intimacy with His people whom one has shared fellowship (eaten and drank)
  - i. The taking of the Lord's Supper, the tasting of His Spirit's power, and the sharing of the cup of His blessings upon the Church are not indicative of one's belonging to Christ
  - ii. It is possible to be very involved in the church and not to be known by Christ
    1. It is possible to keep Jesus "in our streets" and not let Him rule our house
    2. There is a distance here amidst the intimacy, eating with Jesus, but not loving Him, knowing His teaching, but not "hearing" His teaching
      - a. Notice that they don't say that they heard and followed, but rather that He arrived and taught in their streets
        - i. The word here for streets is "broad streets", the major streets of the city
        - ii. Thus, we saw you teaching and we liked some things about you, but we didn't invite you over into our own neighborhood
        - iii. We respect you as a teacher, but we didn't need a Savior!
      - b. There is no following, no trust, no love of Jesus, no allegiance, no adherence, no desire for Him until the door is shut
  - iii. It is not familiarity with Jesus that is important, but the response of humble dependence that squeezes through the door, i.e. powerless dependence
    1. Note that the outsiders' defense is based upon nearness to Him, but not submission to Him
    2. It is based upon their works, not His, their promises, not His
    3. "We have done these things in relationship to you" rather than "You are our hope and salvation!"
- d. Why can't God just let everyone in?
  - i. For the same reason that you don't let any stranger into your home: you don't know them
  - ii. Jesus responds from the closed door, "I don't know where you come from. Depart from me, you workers of unrighteousness!"
    1. Interestingly, it is not merely a lack of intimate knowledge of the person that Jesus alludes to, but rather to where they come from.
    2. They don't belong to the kingdom for they are not from the kingdom.
    3. The reality is that those born of the kingdom, born of the Spirit of God, are transformed by the life of God in them, through faith in Jesus, and thus belong to the kingdom
      - a. See Psalm 138:6 – "For though the LORD is exalted, He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar."
      - b. Jer 1:5 – "I knew you and appointed you a prophet to the nations"
        - i. God knew and God sent out from Himself and for Himself
      - c. Isaiah 63:16-17
  - iii. In spite of trite slogans today, Jesus is clearly stating that not everyone belongs in His house, and that is the hard truth of the exclusivity of Jesus

1. He holds the key, turns the handle, and opens the door
  2. While the door is open, enter in humble dependence upon Him, for there will come a day when it will be too late
    - a. All those born of the Spirit will enter, for God doesn't fail
4. There is Intimacy with God Inside and Terrors Outside
- a. Jesus will EXCLUDE: Outside is weeping and gnashing of teeth
    - i. These two words, phrases really, are OT indicatives of a loss of blessing, of being outside of the covenant promises
    - ii. Thus, this group of Jewish believers is told that they will be looking in on the OT prophets and patriarchs receiving the promised blessings from outside the walls, thus they are devastated and respond with both physical weeping and emotional gnashing
    - iii. It is this "casting out" from the blessings of God that indicates such severe loss and tragedy, the true removal from the open door, being outside the glory of God and His people
  - b. Jesus will INCLUDE: Inside is reclining at the table of God's King
    - i. This is an eschatological symbol of God's blessing and nearness and honor
    - ii. To eat at the King's Table is to be honored and accepted and beloved
  - c. This blessing, says Jesus, will be for those who are "far off" from all over the world
    - i. Thus, the Gentiles would recline at the table with the patriarchs and prophets (note there is no distinction here of those at the table – all recline and dine), whom appeared far away and "last", while the ones who appeared "first" in line to receive the blessings refused to come in through the narrow door and are left outside.
    - ii. This is, finally, the answer to the question that the man asked
      1. Yes, there would be many, but they will not be whom you expect
      2. Thus, the "last" ones will be first and the "first" ones will be last
  - d. This is our hope – the glory of God
    - i. To see His glory in greater and greater degree
    - ii. To hear glory from God, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!"
5. We Dine Because He Died
- a. Jesus is going through towns and villages
    - i. To teach of the Kingdom of God *because*
    - ii. He was "journeying toward Jerusalem"
      1. The teaching of the Kingdom would make much more sense post-Jerusalem, so He taught as He went toward His execution
      2. He was a "dead man walking" - and while He walked, He taught.
      3. He was going to His agony *for us*
      4. He was going to open the way to the Father's blessing for us
  - b. Jesus is the Narrow Door (John 14:6)
  - c. He gained our inclusion by being excluded (Heb 13:12)
  - d. We enter through His great agony (Rev 1:5-6)
  - e. He is the Master of the House because He Journeyed to Jerusalem (Heb 5:8-10)

Conclusion: The question is not, "Will many be saved?" but rather the question is: "Will it be you?" Strive to enter through the narrow door by humble faith in Jesus. BLESSING: Philippians 3:8-14