

Are There Few Who Will Be Saved?

*Bible Commentary by Joseph F. Harwood
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In Luke 13, beginning in verse 22, we read that Jesus was passing through cities and villages and teaching as He was making His way toward Jerusalem. Someone in one of the crowds asked Him if only a few people would be saved. Jesus replied to them saying:

“Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 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 13:24-25, emphasis added).

Jesus is the door for His sheep. In John 10 Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, ***I am the door*** of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ***I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*** (John 10:7-9, emphasis added.)

So, in the response to the question from the crowd that we see in Luke 13:24-25, Jesus did not really give a direct answer to the question of whether only a few would be saved. However, He did say that “many” would try to enter through that “narrow door” to salvation, which is Jesus Himself, and they would not be able to do so.

Also, when Jesus said to the crowd to “strive to enter through the narrow door”, we must understand that He was not urging the people to “strive” to do works that would be “good enough” to get them through that narrow door. (Consider Ephesians 2:8-9.) Rather, His response was essentially to sow the “seed” of the Gospel message in their hearing (Matthew 13:1-23), the message the He is “narrow door”; He is “the way, and the truth, and the life”, and no one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:6).

While Jesus did not give a direct answer to the crowds in Luke 12 as to whether only a few would be saved, we can find a more direct answer to this question in Matthew 7, where He said to the crowds in the sermon on the mount: “*Enter through the narrow gate*; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are *many* who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are *few* who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14).

So, we see from this passage in Matthew 7 that while Jesus said to the crowds, “enter through the narrow gate”, in the final analysis “many” will enter through the wide gate and travel the broad way that leads to destruction. And by contrast, only a “few” will enter through the narrow gate and travel that narrow path that leads to life, that narrow gate being Jesus Christ Himself.

When we consider the numerous religions that exist throughout the world and how many people adhere to those religions, it is easy for us to grasp the idea that only a few will be saved. However, when we consider some of Jesus’ other teachings, we can see that even some of those who profess to be Christians will not be able to enter through that “narrow gate”.

The parable of the ten virgins is recorded in Matthew 25:1-13. In this parable we see that all ten virgins were waiting for the bridegroom. The five wise virgins brought their lamps with them, and they also brought oil for their lamps. The five foolish virgins brought their lamps as well, but they brought no oil for their lamps. And since their lamps were going out, they had to leave to go and buy some oil.

Then there was an announcement that the bridegroom had arrived. The wise virgins were ready and went into the wedding feast with the bridegroom, and the door was shut. The other virgins returned later saying, “Lord, lord, open up for us.” But he answered, Truly I say to you, I do not know you.” (Matthew 25:11-12).

In this parable, the “lamps” that all ten virgins brought with them symbolize a profession of faith in Christ. The “oil”, which the wise virgins brought with them, but the foolish did not, symbolizes a genuine faith in Christ. The bridegroom is Jesus Himself, and the wedding feast symbolizes an eternity with Christ in Heaven. So, we learn in this parable that some will profess faith in Christ, but they do not in fact possess a genuine faith in Him, and they will therefore be unable to go into the wedding feast with the bridegroom; they will be unable to enter through the “narrow door” (Again Luke 13:24-25).

The individuals represented by the foolish virgins in this parable are the same individuals represented in Matthew 7:15-23 as “false prophets”, who come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, claiming to be Christians, but inwardly they are “ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). They are false “prophets” in the sense that their “profession” of faith in Christ is false. They are bad trees that bear no good fruit (verses 16-20). As Jesus concluded His teaching in this passage, He said of these false prophets:

“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, emphasis added)

So, we see from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:15-23 that “many” will come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, claiming to be Christians, when in fact they are not. They may be convinced that they are indeed Christians, and they may have many works to offer as evidence of their genuine faith, but in the end, Jesus will tell them that He never knew them, and He will command them to depart from Him.

These same professing but unregenerate individuals are also represented in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14. In this parable, a man who accepted the invitation to come to the wedding feast did in fact come and was found among other guests who were attired in wedding clothes. However, the king who had given the wedding feast for his son noticed that this man was not himself attired in wedding clothes. As Jesus concluded this parable, He said: “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:13-14).

In the parable of the wedding feast, the king represents God the Father. The king’s son is Jesus. The wedding clothes signify the righteousness of Christ, or a genuine faith in Christ, without which no one will enter the kingdom of Heaven. The wedding feast symbolizes an eternity with Christ in Heaven.

When Jesus said that “many are called, but few are chosen”, He was teaching that many are “called to the wedding feast” when they hear the outward proclamation of the gospel message. This was the case with the man who accepted

the invitation to come to the wedding feast but was found by the king to be without “wedding clothes”. Even though many are “called” in this way, only a few are chosen by God to be brought to faith in Christ.

The “foolish virgins” of Matthew 25:1-13, the “false prophets” of Matthew 7:15-23, the man who accepted the invitation to the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 but was not attired in wedding clothes, and the tares among the wheat in Matthew 13:24-30, are all the same individuals. They will profess faith in Christ, but they are in fact unregenerate, and they will one day hear these words from Jesus: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:23).

In summary, those who do not adhere to the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and through Him alone will not be saved (John 8:24, 14:6, Acts 4:12). And Jesus also taught that “many” (Matthew 7:22), even from among those who profess faith in Him, will not be saved because they do not possess a genuine faith. They will be found to be among those whom He never knew, and He will command them to depart from Him (Matthew 7:23).

However, for those of us who have received a genuine faith in Christ, we received that gift of faith not because of any works or merit of our own (Ephesians 2:8-9), or because of any decision of our own will (Romans 9:16), but only because God our Father “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

In God’s time we were born into the world, and again in God’s time He called us to faith in His Son. And all of us whom He called, He also justified, and all of us whom He justified, He will ultimately glorify together with Christ in Heaven, according to the order that Paul described in Romans 8:29-30. Our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ in God’s own doing from beginning to end.