

**The Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus**  
***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...”***

Passages: Ezekiel 41:13-26  
 Luke 13:22-30

A few weeks ago, we started a new sermon series entitled, *“The Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus”*. Today’s *Uncomfortable Saying* is found in Luke’s Gospel, chapter 13, verses 24 and 25. Let me read it to you again.

***<sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. <sup>25</sup> Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’”***

Two things make this passage uncomfortable:

First, there seems to be an idea, here, that we have to make an ***“effort to enter through the narrow door”***. “But” (we say), “isn’t the Gospel about God’s grace and love?” “Doesn’t God accept us as we are?” What does Jesus mean when He tells the man to ***“make every effort”***? Does this mean that we can only get into heaven through our good deeds? This is the first reason why Jesus’ words are uncomfortable.

The second thing that makes us uncomfortable is the way this passage seems to portray God (‘the owner of the house’). Is He really so heartless that he will ***“close the door”*** on a whole lot of people? Isn’t this unfair -- some people will be ‘inside’ while others will be ‘outside’? God also seems to be quite callous! It sounds as if the omniscient, all-knowing God tells those who are outside (***“knocking and pleading”*** to come in), “Sorry folks, but ***‘I don’t know you, or where you come from.’*** How can the all-knowing God not know us?

It’s a very uncomfortable passage! Are you feeling uncomfortable?

**Let’s pray.**

This passage is usually called ‘*the narrow-door*’ passage. But, I reckon that a better title would be ‘*the cynical-spectator*’ passage. I say that because of the way the Greek text is phrased. As Jesus is teaching and preaching on His way to Jerusalem, the NIV translation of the Greek text tells us that someone came up to Jesus and asked him a question: "**Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?**" The NIV is portraying the man as an innocent by-stander; someone who is simply asking Jesus an innocent question about heaven.

But, the fact is, there is no punctuation in the original Greek text. In the Greek text, the man literally says: "*Lord, if few are the ones being saved.*" That’s it! Although the NIV turns this into a **question ("Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?")**, it could have just as easily been a **statement ("Lord, if few are the ones being saved")**.

There’s another problem with the NIV translation—They’ve got the tense wrong! The Greek **does not** say (as in the NIV), *Are only a few people going to be saved?* In the Greek text, the man literally says: "*Lord, if few are the ones being saved.*" Get the difference? He’s not talking about the **future** (“going to be saved”) but the **present** (“are being saved”).

Do you want my opinion? As I look at the original passage, I get the strong impression that this man was not an innocent by-stander, merely asking a question of Jesus! He was a cynical spectator, boldly **stating his opinion**; he was a political analyst, **telling Jesus** his personal observation of the **current** situation: "*Lord, few are the ones being saved.*"

Indeed, I’m absolutely convinced that *reading the text in this way* fits the context so much better! What’s the context? **Jesus is headed to Jerusalem.** That’s what verse 22 is deliberately reminding us of when it says, "*Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.*"

But, **why** was Jesus going to Jerusalem? Most people, like this man, would have thought that Jesus was going there with a *political agenda*! After all, Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel. And so, they would have imagined that Jesus was making a *political* move; that He was going to Jerusalem to convince the nation’s leaders that He was, in fact, Israel’s Messiah! (In Australian terms,

people would have thought that Jesus was making a bid for the Lodge!) They thought He was going to Jerusalem to prove to Israel's leaders that *He was the man*...and that He had the popular support of the whole nation!

But the fact is that *this man actually doubts that Jesus is the 'people's choice'!* Indeed, what this man says to Jesus is quite a put-down: "*Jesus, don't fool yourself! Only a few people are following you! Only a few are listening to you! Only a few are being saved!*" **So, why do you even bother going to Jerusalem?**

And you know what? In a sense, he was dead-right! As far back as John 6, we're told that many people had stopped following Jesus because His preaching was too difficult to understand! (John 6:60-- "*On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"*" John 6: 66-- "*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*") It seems there was a time when Jesus was failing to draw the crowds; a time when only the most committed of His original disciples were still hanging on.

That's why this man made such a bold statement. He was warning Jesus to open His eyes to the reality that His ministry was becoming a joke! "*You are a failure, Jesus!..."You see, only a few are being saved.*"

**But, here's where the story gets interesting!** What is Jesus' response to this put-down? The fact is that Jesus is not giving up! Even if *everyone* abandons Him, He will still go to Jerusalem. Why? Because **He's not going there to prove Himself** or to become a hero in the eyes of the world. He alone knows that **He must go to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world!** In other words, Jesus knows what He is on about, and He's determined to accomplish His Father's plans for the salvation of the world.

That's why Jesus speaks to this man in the way He does! Sure, His words may sound rude or even arrogant, but the point is, **Jesus is laying down a challenge to this man to personally reconsider who He is— Jesus (and His cross) is the narrow door!**

Listen again:

***"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.*"<sup>25</sup> *Once the owner of the house***

***gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'***

Think carefully about what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is not telling the man that he has *to earn his way to heaven!* Given this context, Jesus is simply telling him to stop looking around at others; stop listening to what others are saying. Instead, this man must *wrestle* with the facts for himself. Indeed, the Greek word is ***“agonise”***. He must struggle to use his brain! He must ***make every effort*** to reflect on all that the Old Testament has said about the Messiah...and to examine the evidence before him of all that Jesus has done and said... and then, he must *make up his own mind!* ***“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door”!*** Or, to put it another way, Jesus is telling him to ***“Come, follow me”***-- follow me to the cross!

But there's a follow-up question that we need to ask here: **If Jesus (and His cross) is the 'narrow door', where does the narrow door lead?** Does it lead to a distant heaven...a *pie in the sky when you die bye and bye*? Not at all! Jesus is calling Himself the 'narrow door' because He is the door into God's Temple—the door (according to Ezekiel's vision) through which the glory of the Lord entered and filled the Temple. In other words, Jesus sees Himself as the only way to *presently* enter into God's temple—the only way to a *relationship* with God. Indeed, **that is salvation!** To be saved is to know God and to know Him now, not just in the future! To be saved is to be in a *present* state of fellowship with the One who created you! **And Jesus is the narrow door into that relationship!** (It reminds me of John 14:6- ***“I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the father except through Me!”***)

Of course, this man may have once *verbally claimed* to be one of Jesus' followers. He may have even been present at every one of Jesus' miracles. But, the fact is, he is now doubting Jesus; he may even be making fun of Jesus! What this means is that **he is refusing to go through the narrow door.** Why? **Because he doesn't think anyone else is!** *“So few are being saved!”*, he says... *“so why should I join you?”*

Now, with this in mind, we can go back to the second of our two initial questions of discomfort about the passage!

**Is God** ('the owner of the house') **really so heartless** that he will "*close the door*" on a whole lot of innocent people? Not at all! God is not heartless, for that is why He sent His Son to this earth. That is why Jesus went to the cross, to die for the sins of the world. How can anyone accuse God of being heartless?

But the whole point of this passage is this: **Not even God can change what you have determined for yourself!** If you decide against Jesus, you have told God that you don't want His offer of compassion and kindness. You don't want His solution to fix this messed up world.

What more can God do when He offers us *a doorway* to salvation, but human beings choose to stay outside?

You know, sociologists tell us that the optimum age to turn to Christ...the age when most people are converted...is when we are in our 20's. That's the time of our lives when we ask the most questions about life and its meaning. Before that (as teenagers), our brains aren't really up to asking these sorts of questions; and when we are older, we have usually settled down so much that we dare not ask the questions! That's why the Scriptures repeatedly tell us that "***Today is the day of salvation!***" Now is the time to turn to Jesus and be saved. Now is the golden opportunity to step through the open door. "***Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...*** Do it now, before your heart grows cold and you join the ranks of the cynical and the doubters.

The man in our story seems to have already made up his mind. But Jesus won't let him rest! He attempts to shake him up; to get him to think; to force him to look at the evidence and change his opinion of Jesus. Why? **Because the consequences of turning away from Jesus are eternal!** If you turn away now, while you the opportunity is in front of you...while the door is fully open..., the probability is that you will increasingly harden your heart against Jesus to the point that you will never go through the open door.

And then, what? Well, you (like everyone else) will one day die. You (like everyone else) will go down to the grave. And although, at this point, you might finally cry out to God for mercy, it will be too late! Does that sound harsh on God's part?

In Luke 16, there's a story about two men: one, a beggar named Lazarus and the other, a rich man who lived in luxury. They both died. The beggar who, throughout his life had depended on God and already trusted in His grace, ended up at Abraham's side in paradise. The rich man, however, who never paid attention to anyone else but himself, ended up far away from that perfect place and alienated from God. According to the story, that's when he began crying out for God's mercy. But God's response to him was quite simple: A chasm has been fixed between you and us-- a chasm that no one can cross.

Again, I ask-- Does that sound harsh? Or is it simply a reality that everyone needs to consider before they die? I mean, aren't we (as human beings) responsible for the choices we make in this life? If we choose to go our own way and do our own thing in this life, only thinking about ourselves, is it then harsh to say that we will finally "*reap what we have sown*"?

The time to go through the narrow door is **now**! Once your life is over, the door gets closed. And that's when the Father must say, "***I do not know you, or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers***" (v. 27). (Of course, He does *know* you, as I might know Tony Abbott! But the point is, God doesn't have a relationship with you. That's what true knowing is about.)

**As we come towards the end of today's passage, I have one last comment to make.** At the beginning of today's passage, we heard a cynical spectator make a derogatory statement about Jesus; about how Jesus had failed to gain a following. "*Lord, only a few are being saved*", he said. Interestingly, however, by the end of the dialogue, Jesus corrects this man's false perceptions. Listen to verse 29-- "***People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God***". Jesus is telling the man, "*You thought only a few were being saved? Well, let me tell you, you haven't got a clue! My followers will be many. From every corner of the world, people will come; people who (unlike you) are not too afraid or too concerned about what others think to accept and acknowledge me publicly as their Saviour.*"

In fact, says Jesus, "***There are those who are last who will be first, and those who are first who will be last.***" What's Jesus' point? Well, the man who came

to Jesus was obviously a Jew. Jesus is telling him that, although he (and many other Jews like him) may have been the first to hear the Gospel *and to reject it*, the fact is that many Gentiles, who will be the last to hear the Gospel, will be the first to respond to it and receive it.

### **Now, how do we apply this passage to us today?**

Well, ultimately the passage is about **numbers**! The man in our story feels he can't follow Jesus because, from what he sees, *"only a few people are being saved"*. In other words, he doesn't think Jesus is popular enough to be followed...or that Jesus is cool enough to draw a crowd...or that Jesus has got the numbers to make an impression with the bigwigs in Jerusalem. *"If that's all Jesus can do, then why should I be one of the lonely bunnies who follows Him?"*

Maybe you think the same way? After all, the "numbers game" is being played all around us. Who's popular? Who's famous? Who's the best? Who's the biggest? Numbers are so important to us! When, for example, we are asked why we listen to *this or that* radio station, or watch *this or that* TV show, what do we say? "Well, everybody else is!" We haven't made up our own mind! We haven't wrestled with issues of truth, of ethics and morality. We just follow the crowd!

So, if the crowd turns its back on Jesus and says, *"It's too hard! He asks too much! It's way too complicated!"* ...what will we do? Will we go along with the numbers? We will blindly follow so many others in the WESTERN world who are giving up on Jesus? Are we looking around at others and saying, *"I guess Jesus has failed! Let's go elsewhere!"*

Or will you wrestle...struggle...agonise...*make every effort*... to know Jesus Christ, and, in your search for truth, be set free from the numbers game!

I ask that question because the cold fact is that one day we will all stand before God. And at that point, it will be too late to plead, ***"Sir, open the door for us!"*** If, in this life, you have neglected or rejected Jesus' offer to go through Him, *the narrow door*, into a relationship with God the Father, then on the other side of the great divide of death, there will be no opportunity to change your position. I know that may make us feel uncomfortable, but that's the way it is!

And that's why Jesus said to the man...the doubter; the sceptic; the one who was more concerned with the numbers game than he was with the truth...

***<sup>24</sup> "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.***

Let's pray.