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## Prayers

### To God

#### Weekly theme - dedication to the Lord God

This is Your day, Lord God, and I dedicate it to You. May each deed I do be worthy of one who is called a Christian; may each word I say be a worthy expression of Your love; may my every thought be worthy of a mind that is dedicated to truth and godliness; and may my feelings reflect one who is not bound by selfishness but liberated and blessed by the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God. AMEN

### For myself

*Consider your own appearance. As you think about this, submit your thought to the Lord and let Him be the judge of these things, not yourself; listen to what He says about you.*

### For others

*Pray for those who are ill and await treatment, unsure whether they will be able to afford it or unsure whether they will live or die.*

## Meditation

Where are you going?

Where will you go to try and find love?  
You waste your time in endless searching  
But why will you not first come to me?

When will you decide?

When will you come around to the truth?  
You ponder forever the thoughts of your mind,  
But why will you not trust in my Word?

How will you fare?

How will you get on as you step out today?  
You follow the obvious and then sink in sand,  
But why not climb high on the Rock?

Why will you prevaricate?

Why is it so hard to face the future you see?

You risk all to play on the lottery of life,  
But lose everything in Christ, and gain all!

## Bible Passage

### **Luke 13:22-30**

<sup>22</sup> Jesus went on His way through the towns and villages, teaching as He journeyed towards Jerusalem.

<sup>23</sup> Someone asked Him,

*"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"*

He said to them,

***<sup>24</sup> "Do your very best to go in through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will try to get in and be unable to do so. <sup>25</sup> For once the owner of the house has come and closed the door, you will then stand outside, knocking and pleading,***

***'Lord, open the door for us.'***

***"But He will answer,***

***'I do not know you or where you come from!'***

***<sup>26</sup> "You will then begin to say,***

***'We ate and drank with You, and You taught in our streets.'***

***<sup>27</sup> "And He will respond by saying,***

***'I do not know you or where you come from. Go away from me, all you evildoers!'***

***<sup>28</sup> "There will be weeping and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but as for you, you will be thrown out! <sup>29</sup> People will come from the east, west, north and south, and sit down to feast in the Kingdom of God; <sup>30</sup> and take note of this, some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last."***

## Review

At this point in Luke, we find Jesus journeying towards Jerusalem, teaching as He goes. He is then stopped short by someone asking Him about a topical subject amongst rabbis of the day. Opinion was divided amongst them over whether God would fulfil His earlier promise to save the whole Israelite nation, or whether some would be turned away because of sin. Remember that in the first century, many Jews were scattered around the Roman Empire with no access to Temple worship or its sacrificial system for the forgiveness of sin (Lev. 1-4). Some were therefore uncertain as to whether God's grace could account for those of Abraham's children who did not keep strictly to God's 'Laws'.

As so often, Jesus was not interested in the debates of rabbis! He was nevertheless interested in correcting misperceptions about the Kingdom of God; His teaching here is a

mixture of parable (13:24-25), judgement (13:26,27) and End Time prophecy (13:28-30), and contains a great deal of interest to us. It has echoes of other Scriptures (Matt 7:13f. 19:30; 20:16), but as it stands, it is unique to Luke. Our passage is a blunt warning to Jews not to presume they are saved (13:27-30), and a stern warning to any who think their pathway to heaven requires of them no earthly effort. Of course, we must be careful lest this message begins to sound like 'salvation by works'. It is nothing of the sort, but it does inform us that God's gracious gift of salvation may not be found if no effort is put into seeking it. This is a different matter entirely.

The question put to Jesus was interesting but abstract; *'Lord, will those who are saved be few?'* (13:23). It is a question that cannot of itself lead to an understanding of salvation! Jesus knew this, and immediately began to use pictures similar to those He had used in the Sermon on the Mount to describe salvation. We all remember the *'narrow'*, instead of the *'broad pathway'* (Matthew 7:13f.), the idea of *'seeking'* in order to find, and *'knocking'* in order to open the door to God's will (Matthew 7:7f.). Here, Jesus puts this all together to speak only of a *'narrow doorway'* by which God's Kingdom is entered (13:24), a phrase containing all the powerful ideas of His earlier illustrations, including the effort of seeking God's will.

We may safely say that Jesus taught that effort is required of those who seek God's Kingdom; salvation is by His grace alone, but the pursuit of holiness and practical Christian living requires effort. What Jesus says here is similar to Paul's description of the Christian life as a race to win a prize (1 Corinthians 9:24f.). In his illustration, the prize is the fulfilment of salvation by grace which is the soul's abode with Christ in His Kingdom, but the race requires effort. The teaching of both Jesus and Paul is that salvation is not to be received as if it makes no demands on us; Christ alone saves the soul, but the narrow doorway and pathway leading through this life to God's Kingdom require our pursuit and effort.

Jesus' parable now takes a different turn, as He speaks prophetically about the time when *'the owner of the house has come and closed the door'* (13:25). This is the moment of Judgement, which Jesus speaks of as close at hand. So there is a definite time limit on entry into God's Kingdom! Jesus then reports a dialogue between the Lord who has closed the door and those who failed to enter it before it was closed (13:25-27). There is much feeling of angst and anger (13:27,28), but there is no going back on God's judgement. Those who have not knocked on the narrow door eventually find that it has closed; destiny is sealed.

It is hard for us to imagine the sense of shock generated here. The man who asked Jesus the question assumed that every descendant of Abraham could be saved and come into God's presence if they did not sin. But Jesus dismisses this idea! Those who are shut out are Jewish people who have known Him; they *'ate and drank with You, and You taught in our streets'* (13:26). Jesus is speaking of those who have observed His ministry but not believed in Him, and He seems to be saying that Jews will be excluded from God's Kingdom because they have not sought the *'narrow door'*! He is warning those who listen to Him that the time of repentance will soon be past, and they cannot assume God's judgement will never catch them out. They play with eternal destiny as with fire.

The last part of this passage describes the frustration, disappointment and rage of Jesus' hearers, Jews, who have not sought the *'narrow door'* and found themselves excluded from God's favour. The closed door of God's judgement is sternest point in Jesus' teaching, but one that is entirely consistent with His life and ministry. Before He died, Jesus wept for His own people who had rejected God and turned away from Him (Matt 21:17f., 24:32). But more than this, to the utter dismay of the Jews, those once beyond God's grace, the Gentiles, now stand before them as recipients of God's grace and mercy! Yes, the Gentiles from the *'east, west, north and south'* have entered the *'narrow door'* and been saved (13:29)! Jesus knew full well the consequences of His mission.

To sum up, Jesus repeats a famous phrase He frequently used to illustrate God's alternative and heavenly world. He says that those who appear to have been left behind, the '*last*', will come '*first*' into God's Kingdom, and those who thought they were virtually there, the '*first*' will find themselves '*last*', excluded because of their lack of engagement with God. The primary interpretation of this saying is therefore that Gentiles will enter God's Kingdom before Jews! This is also cause for thought for any who assume to know God's will. One thing is certain, Jesus wanted His disciples to seek God's Kingdom through the '*narrow doorway*' of faith in Him rather than through privilege or power.

It would be wise to be careful about verse 30, which is often quoted like this, '*the last will be first and the first will be last*'. This sounds rather like a general code of law, but Jesus's words are softer and more specific. The translation '*some who are last will be first ...*' conveys the agonising truth that the Jews had missed the truth of God's revelation, but it also contains the idea that judgement is not yet complete. It applies to '*some*', not to all. ; indeed, as Scripture testifies elsewhere, God's plans for His Old Testament people are more complex (see Romans 9-11).

This powerful passage reminds us that despite the awesome and beautiful things promised by Jesus such as healing and salvation, there is another 'side' to His message. Jesus wants people to believe in Him, but He also warns them to turn from sin, to put effort into seeking God's ways, to accept His judgement, and to face the consequences of their actions. Thank God Jesus condensed these important things into simple stories!

## Going Deeper

### ***Notes on the text and translation***

#### **V24    '*do your very best to go in*'**

##### *Other translations:*

*'make every effort' to enter' (NIV)*

*'strive to enter' (NRSV)*

The Greek word here is interesting; it means '*to contend for a prize*', or '*struggle*'. Jesus' plain meaning here is that hard work is involved in pursuing entry through the '*narrow door*', indeed, this Greek word is the one from which we get the English word '*agonise*'! This is however no teaching of '*salvation by works*', or by effort; our study explains this by calling our attention to the difference between the pursuit of a prize and the prize itself.

#### **V27    '*Go away from me!*'**

##### *Other translations:*

*'away from me!' (NIV)*

*'depart from me!' (NRSV)*

The Greek word translated here '*Go away*' is the same one from which we get the important church word '*apostate*', which refers to someone or something that has '*moved away from God*'. You may have heard of the sin of '*apostasy*', which means to purposefully '*depart from the things of God*'. The word also has the meaning of '*thrust out by force*'. This perhaps helps to explain the famous

passage of Matthew where Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God suffering 'violence' (Matt 11:12f.), meaning the violence of the eviction of those who presume to enter but are not worthy.

## **Further Comments**

### **Salvation - Jewish ideas.**

The general theory of salvation amongst Jewish people in Jesus's day was that all God's people would be saved, except for a few evil doers who blasphemed or against God in some way, or sinned unrepentantly. Arguments therefore raged about the size of this sin and how far it extended within the state of Israel as it existed in the first century.

The man in this passage is therefore asking about where the dividing line will come; will few make the cut or many? Jesus answers him by warning about the presumptions of Jewish people about salvation; He says that the numbers will be much fewer than imagined, moreover, no one can assume they are safe. All must strive for the '*narrow door*' of entry into God's Kingdom.

### **Moses and the two pathways - Jeremiah**

Jesus speaks here about a narrow door, but in Matthew 7:13f. He offers a fuller teaching about two alternative pathways, a narrow pathway and a broad pathway, and this is similar to the idea of a '*narrow door*'. Similar ideas are also found in Jeremiah 21:8, where the prophet describes two alternatives; the way of life, and the way of death. This itself is derived from the message of Moses in Deuteronomy, where he describes the '*blessing*' of those who walk in God's ways and the '*curse*' on those who reject this (Deuteronomy 11:26f.).

So in truth, choice and decision making are built in to the relationship of God's people with their Lord, from the earliest of scriptural times. Jesus picks up this theme, and it is not new.

### **Rabbis and preaching in the streets**

Some rabbis did not allow teaching in the open streets; they believed that their teaching was something like a secret to be handed on to select learners. Jesus clearly did not take his new. He believed that the truth was that available for all people, and he taught openly in the streets. In this way, some may have believed they knew the way into God's Kingdom merely because they had heard the Good News from Jesus' lips. But Jesus insists that hearing is not sufficient; true faith in Jesus is shown by actions.

### **The conversion of the Gentiles**

This is one of many passages of Scripture where Jesus speaks candidly about the salvation of the Gentiles. This comes where Jesus speaks of people coming '*from the east, west, north and south, and sit down to feast in the Kingdom of God*' (13:29). The Bible tends to use this language to refer to all those redeemed by God, who are drawn into His presence, see Psalm 107:3f., Isaiah 43:5f. Some would argue that this refers exclusively to the people of Israel who have been scattered throughout the world and are called to return to Jerusalem. I suggest that the prophet Isaiah has more in mind that this, because he calls Israel to be a '*light to the nations*' (42:6, 49:6f.). Moreover, the whole of Isaiah's prophecies point towards a

larger and more encompassing work of salvation than merely for the Jews (see Isaiah 54:1f., 61:1f.).

It is therefore quite reasonable to expect that Jesus anticipated the salvation of the Gentiles and understood this calling. He knew that people other than God's own would one day come into the presence of God

### ***The Messianic Banquet***

The messianic banquet is a common feature of the New Testament found in Matthew 25:10ff. and Revelation 19:9ff. and in other ancient Jewish texts. It is an indication of God's essential hospitality and generosity to all who will accept God's invitation. But Jesus has some harsh things to say about coming to the banquet, which is a study in itself (see Matthew 22:2, Luke 12:31f. 14:8f.)

## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Pursuing the gift of grace to its heavenly fulfilment***

What does it mean for us today to 'knock' on the narrow doorway that grants us access to God's Kingdom? To begin with, I reckon that all God's people need to show humility in their journey through this world with Christ. People who give the impression that they have found all the answers, climbed all the mountains, understood the whole Bible, and have authority over everyone because they know what is right, are people to be avoided. It is perfectly possible to be confident of one's salvation in Christ and yet humble before the awesome journey that any individual must pursue amidst the struggles of life.

We will learn most from those Christians who travel alongside us, and who knock on God's doors with us. They are people who seek God's will with us, who strive for holiness with us, and who bear the bruises and healed scars of the knocks and spills of real life. Leaders of God's people who lord it over others will never advance the cause of God's Kingdom, however much God, by His grace, is merciful. God is looking for people who will lead His church from those who have the humility to example real faith, walk with strangers, open up God's word to them, help the poor on their way, share suffering and joy, and minister the love of God in both good times and ill. These people knock on the narrow doors of God's Kingdom and encourage others to do the same.

#### ***Judgement and the Jews***

It is a sobering thought to contemplate the Scriptural evidence for God's rejection of His own people because of their sin. At a time when many Christian communities are trying to relocate with their faith roots in Judaism, we do well to remember this passage. Paul wrote in Romans ( mainly Chapter 11), to say that the Jews were no longer 'God's people' because they had rejected their God and His 'Servant', Jesus Christ. But out of his mercy, God would 're-graft' His Old Testament people back into the kingdom, at the very end, when he comes again. So although we do well to respect Jewish people and love them, we should not forget that Judaism as a religion has rejected God in Jesus, and insists that it has done so. We worship the same God and have the same history as the Jews, but the Old Testament people of God have gone their own way today, and it is not God's way.

There is no direct compatibility between Judaism and Christianity, except that by God's own mercy, Scripture says that out of His love, He will ultimately forgive their sins at the end of time because they are His people. There are only a few things in the Bible that are said to be saved until Christ's coming again, and this is one of them.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Ask yourself the question, 'how many will be saved?' What do you believe? Of everything you know about the Christian Gospel, do you believe that numbers will be large or few? Take turn to explore this question, perhaps using the Internet.
- Use a Bible dictionary, either on this website, or one you own, or one on the Internet, to explore the term 'Judgement', and what it means when Christ comes again?•? Something great it are of sisters: all services of weather Watchers to do thanks zero

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. When Jesus speaks about the 'narrow door', what does this picture mean to you, and how will you seek to go through it?
2. Does that the threat of God's judgement mean anything to people today, Christians or non-Christians? What should it mean?
3. What does the phrase '*the last will be first and the first will be last*' mean for Christians today? What does it mean to you?

## **Final Prayer**

Thank you Lord Jesus for showing me the way of life. Thank you for leading me to the 'narrow door', and given me a heart to seek my destiny of the eternal prize of my salvation. I know You are my Saviour, and I ask you to hear my prayer of faith, now and always. AMEN

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