Strive

Streams of Refreshing · Luke 13

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Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out (Luke 13:23-28).

Some persons seem constantly occupied with religious questions. Their enquiry is not, “Am I saved?” but, “Are others saved?” Sometimes we find a fond parent solicitous about the future state of a dying child, a kind master anxious about his afflicted servant’s spiritual condition, and others manifesting concern for the ignorant and poor around them, without laying to heart what their own state before God really is. It was so in the days of our Lord. One said unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved?

to which Jesus replied, Strive to enter in at the strait gate {Luke 13:24}.

Thus He sought to lead him away from the consideration of others, to ponder the all-important question of his own soul’s salvation; and exposed the folly of appearing concerned for others, while he himself was in the broad road to destruction. So weighty, so essential, is the point, and so fatal would a mistake be, that He commands them to strive (or agonize) to enter in at the strait gate.

We do well to observe, that the instruction here is not that they were to do a great many things, or even one thing, to make themselves fit for God; or that they were to wander through a long, tedious labyrinth to find blessing and safety. No; it is simply a gate

that is presented to them as the alone way of escape; and their security and blessing depended on their entering in at the gate. The condition of all outside is most perilous; but there is a way of escape; and judgment and condemnation must overtake those who do not accept the only way of deliverance by entering in at the strait gate. 1. WHAT IS THE STRAIT GATE? There could have been no way of escape for sinners from the wrath to come, had not Jesus died upon the cross.

said He: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved {John 10:9}.

The cross of Christ, therefore, becomes the point of separation between the saved and lost. Not to enter into God’s presence through this gate is still to tarry in the place of death and judgment; but to

enter into the Father's presence through the atoning work of His dear Son is present peace and eternal salvation. The gospel thus presents to us a door of escape, and it is still wide open; it welcomes all guilty sinners that enter in

by faith, thus sheltering them for ever from the wrath of God, and shutting them into the peace-speaking presence of the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort. 2. IT IS A STRAIT GATE. True Christianity is an individual thing. The gate is so strait, so narrow, that all who enter go in one by one. Many long to take others with them, but each person is accountable to God for himself; every one must be exercised before God on account of his own sin. The gospel appeals to the individual conscience. He that believeth on the Son {John 3:36}, He that hath the Son {1 John 5:12}, He that believeth and is baptized, &c. {Mark 16:16}.

Paul said, I know whom I have believed {2 Tim. 1:12}, I obtained mercy {1 Tim. 1:13, 16},

Christ loved me {Gal. 2:20}.

This is very weighty, and shows us the deep necessity of each one asking the all-important question, "Am I saved?" We may be members of religious bodies, and outwardly appear consistent; but those only who have entered in at the strait gate are saved.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit {John 12:24}.

3. ENTER IN. There is no promise of safety to any who do not

It is the cross of Christ that speaks to us of sin put away, redemption accomplished, and of the sinner's only way to God. Christ crucified, then, is the

at the strait gate. We are not to think about the gate merely, but to

strait gate.

Jesus lifted up on the cross is the door of access. I am the door,

enter in {Luke 13:24} enter in.

It is one thing to know there is a Savior, and another to find salvation through His blood. It is to be feared that many who say they know the way of salvation have not availed themselves of it. We enter in at the strait gate by faith. In the death and resurrection of Christ, we see that the God of grace has opened a

door of salvation for sinners, and by faith in the efficacy of that redemption-work we enter into God's presence, and know Him as a sin-pardoning God. It is not my knowing the fact that Christ is a Savior that saves me, but believing on Him for the salvation of my soul; and thus I enter into the presence of the God of peace by Him. In Israel's time, it was the manslayer who had entered into the city of refuge that was safe. In the days of Noah, those only who actually entered into the ark were

saved. Many might be just outside, trying to lay hold on the boards, with the water gurgling in their throats; but they were as unsaved as those who were the farthest from it. And so in the case of the crowd that surrounded our Lord: it was only the one who came and touched the hem of His garment that was made whole. There must, then, be the receiving of Christ, trusting in Him, believing in Him, taking refuge in Him, resting on His finished work, entering in by Him for life and salvation. 4. STRIVE TO ENTER IN. This solemn subject calls for earnestness. The eternal importance of the work of Christ demands it. God cannot bear indifference. Embracing views merely is a poor thing. Learning a few religious ways and phrases will not do for God. All the world are guilty before Him. Judgment is quickly coming. The wrath of God is soon coming, and fall it must upon all Christless souls. His almighty arm and perfect love have made a door of escape, and His gracious voice exclaims to sinners, Strive, or agonize, to enter in at the strait gate!

Do not be content at having serious impressions, or good desires. Rest not till you have entered in at the strait gate. Be in real earnest. Let not formal duties suffice; let not a little concern satisfy you; let not the credit of being religious among men be enough for you. Oh, no! Have real concern, for eternity is at hand. Your life is short; many will miss the strait gate; many will be deceived; many will find out their mistake when it is too late. Strive, then, agonize to enter in at the strait gate; escape for thy life, flee from the pit, turn to the Savior; on no account miss His great salvation. 5. THERE ARE MANY HINDRANCES TO PERSONS ENTERING IN AT THE STRAIT GATE. (l). The carnal mind. We all naturally like to live and act as if there were no God, and as if we were not needing salvation. We all strive to be happy apart from God and the Savior. We are of the world which lieth in the wicked one. We constantly stray farther from God, doing, as far as possible, our own will, and having our own way. The mind is carnally opposed to God, and not subject to Him; it seeks rest any where rather than in God. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way {Isa. 53:6}.

The heart, therefore, is naturally opposed to striving to enter in at the strait gate. (2). Satan is a great hinderer -- he specially tries to keep persons from taking refuge in Christ for salvation. He blinds the eye, lest the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. Formerly he tried to suppress the mention of the name of Jesus altogether. Now he can no longer effect this; but he

diligently seeks to hinder the testimony to the value of His death. He has not so much objection to people thinking of the strait gate; but he still opposes with all his might their entering in. He knows that persons may be acquainted with the history of Christ’s ways and miracles, and still be unsaved; but it is coming, through Christ crucified, to God for salvation, -- to the risen and ascended Savior for righteousness and glory, that he so opposes. (3). The world also says, Do not enter in at the strait gate. It promises its gains and emoluments, its favours and advancements, its luxuries and gratifications; it presents a glare of tinsel to try to satisfy the human heart, and blind the eye. Its changing fashions, moving scenes, and untiring promises of improvement, occupy the mind; and so it seeks to lull the awakened conscience to find repose in its adulterous bosom. All these elements tend to keep the soul from entering in at the strait gate, and to linger still in the place of condemnation and judgment, where the Lord is coming to put all enemies under His feet. (4). Relations and acquaintances are sometimes

mighty enemies in trying to keep souls, if possible, from entering in at the strait gate. Loss of worldly position or business, the expected scorning of friends, and many other such things, are presented as powerful reasons for disobeying Him who said, Strive to enter in at the strait gate;

while the certain knowledge of present salvation is talked of as presumption, and present forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ put down for enthusiasm. Thus there are terrible obstacles, both within and around, to persons coming to Christ crucified and risen for salvation. (5). THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO "STRIVE." They agonize, or strive to enter in at the strait gate, because they know they are sinners, justly deserving God's eternal condemnation; they are assured that there is no other way of escape, and that "No works or duties of their own Can for the smallest sin atone." They are conscious there is a principle of pride in them naturally, to induce them to put confidence in themselves instead of the atoning work of Christ; therefore, under the guidance and power of the Spirit of God, they inwardly strive against such thoughts. They feel that their proud, carnal minds try to hinder, but they strive.

They hear the alluring cries of the great deceiver, but they strive.

They behold the world's glare, but they

to enter in at the strait gate. They agonize to rest simply on the finished work of Christ, and know there is no other entrance for the sinner into God's happy presence but through the finished work of Jesus. They are not satisfied at merely reading the Scriptures, or knowing a little about Christ, or at being considered religious by others, or at statedly hearing gospel truths proclaimed. No. They feel that they need salvation, and nothing less than

salvation can satisfy them, nothing short of peace with God, against whom they are conscious of having so sinned, will do for them. They know the gate is still open, and they do not know how soon it may he shut. They are conscious that they must perish for ever, if they do not enter in. They perceive that God has opened the gate; that the Savior says, Enter in {Luke 13:24};

that the Scriptures declare it is the only way; that God's servants urgently proclaim its eternal importance, and thousands around declare they have experienced the blessedness of it; therefore they enter in at the strait gate.

They come as guilty, worthless, naked sinners, and they find in Calvary's cross that God Himself is the source of pardon, peace, righteousness, and glory, for all that come unto Him through Christ. Knowing that Christless souls must enter into the pit of eternal destruction, they could not rest till they fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel, and knew that they were saved. By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they experience that they have exchanged a guilty for a purged conscience -- have been rescued from an evil world for the presence of the God of grace and peace; they feel themselves new creatures; they know that they have passed from death unto life, and they rejoice in pardoning love. "Pardon from an offended God, Pardon for crimes of deepest dye, Pardon bestowed through Jesu's blood, Pardon that brings the rebel nigh; Who is a pardoning God like Thee? Or where the grace so rich and free?"

But our Lord gave four reasons why they should strive to enter in at the strait gate. l. Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. 2. The door will be shut. 3. Many professors will be shut out. 4. The eternal torment of the lost. 1. Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. The time will come when it will be too late. Some will knock, and get no admittance. Now the Savior's language is, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest {Matt. 11:28};

and,

Lord, Lord, open unto us {Luke 13:25}!

Now, sinners hide in the Savior's arms, and are saved; then, sinners will seek salvation, and will not find it. Now, they will not come to God to cover their sins with the Redeemer's blood; but by and by they will cry to the rocks and mountains, saying, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb {Rev. 6:16}.

Those who do not know the Savior now will find that He will ere long say, I know you not {Luke 13:25}.

How important, then, that persons should at once enter in at the strait gate!

2. The door will be shut. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door {Luke 13:25}.

The gospel is not always going to be preached. God will not always send forth the message of peace. He is the God of judgment as well as the God of peace, and Christ is a Judge as well as a Savior. He is now seated on the right hand of God, but He will ere long rise up and shut to the door. The preaching of the cross will then cease; the seeker will not find, the knocker will be disappointed, the asker will be refused; the gospel testimony will close, the church be removed to glory, and the hypocrite and unbeliever left for judgment. Men will discover their mistake then. The folly of putting off salvation will be made manifest. The door will be shut, and man's doom eternally settled. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still {Rev. 22:11}.

How imperative, then, is the necessity to strive to enter in at the strait gate.

3. Many professors will be shut out. In the parable of the ten virgins we are told that, after the door is shut, many will come knocking, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us {Matt. 25:11};

and here, also, our Lord says, Many

will say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets; but He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity {Luke 13:26, 27}.

Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely {Rev. 22:17}.

On another occasion our Lord speaks of these persons as saying in that day,

But the time is coming when God must deal with men righteously, instead of in grace, as He now does; for God

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you {Matt. 7:22, 23}!

hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness {Acts 17:31}.

Now, God is preaching to guilty sinners peace by Jesus Christ {Acts 10:36},

then He will judge men according to their works. Now, many will not enter in at the strait gate; then, many will knock, saying,

These things clearly show us that many who have professed to be servants of Christ, and who may have accomplished great things in His name, never knew the value of His sin-atoning work for their own souls, never entered into the strait gate for their own

salvation. How very awful this is! They may have striven to accomplish wonderful works

in His name, but never knew what it was to strive to enter in at the strait gate.

What a solemn warning this presents to any who have not yet trusted in the atoning work of Christ for the salvation of their souls! 4. The eternal torment of the lost. He that believeth not shall be damned {Mark 16:16},

and He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him {John 3:36},

are words of the God of truth which must have their fulfilment. Not to enter in at the strait gate

for salvation, is not to believe in that Savior whom God hath sent, but to be a worker of iniquity {see Luke 13:27},

living in rebellion against the God of love and peace. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth {Luke 13:28}.

They will have the consciousness that others are saved, but themselves for ever lost; they will know that others are for ever happy through the redemption-work of Christ, and they themselves cast into the lake of fire, into everlasting punishment; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. How powerful were the Savior’s appeals! How simple, yet how thrilling, were the reasons He assigned why persons should strive to enter in at the strait gate!

Many will hear these things, and yet not seek the way of escape. Some will not submit to the righteousness of God, but go about to establish their own righteousness; their thoughts rise not higher than their own fancied goodness. Others openly reject the joyful sound of salvation through the death of Christ; they scorn the truth of the Lord’s return from heaven, and scoffingly exclaim -Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the

beginning of the creation {2 Pet. 3:4}.

Others hear the truth, will distinguish between the doctrines of grace and many of the religious dogmas of the day, and show some respect for ordinances and outward sanctity; but their hearts have never yielded to be saved wholly by the finished work of Christ. Their inward thought is, We will not have this man to reign over us {Luke 19:14};

while the Scripture too plainly draws the awful picture of others professing to go out with lamps to meet the bridegroom while being destitute of oil in their lamps; or of attempting to be guests of the marriage supper without having on a wedding garment. In short, while the Scripture plainly shows us that salvation is only to those who enter in at the strait gate,

we find many warnings presented therein of man risking his soul's eternal welfare on almost every conceivable pretence; thus, while God says there is no other way, and no other name, whereby man can be saved, but the name of Jesus, man in self-confidence assumes that there are other names and other ways. Happy those who do not presume to argue and contend with the Almighty, but feel that God is greater than man, and the only fountain of light, and love, and truth. The first sign often manifest of spiritual life is the willingness to lay aside human thoughts, and be ready to submit to God's thoughts; for naturally our thoughts are not as His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways. It is well when a soul is made willing to receive God's truth. Such turn to the Scriptures to know the mind and will of God. From the Bible they learn, under the Spirit's teaching, that fallen man is a corrupt tree that cannot bring forth good fruit; that without union with Christ risen and glorified, there can be no fruit brought forth to God. They are instructed also by the Spirit, through the word of the Lord, that the world is under sentence of condemnation, and that the only way of salvation from the wrath to come is by faith in the Son of God. Thus the awakened soul, that begins to submit to God's thoughts, is led to submit also to God's righteousness and redemption in Christ, and to rejoice in being justified by faith, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, my reader! hast thou entered in at the strait gate? Have the iron sinews of thy knees yet bowed in adoring gratitude to the Savior of sinners? Has thy hard, stony heart been broken by the truth of God, and melted by the Savior's love? Have the tears and groans, the agony and bloody sweat, the suffering and death of the Son of God, been matters of the deepest concern to thee? If not before, may the language of thy soul now be, -"Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Vile I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Savior, or I die."