

We thank You, O Father, that in Your mercy You have redeemed us by Your Son and made us members of Your Kingdom of grace and heirs of Your Kingdom of glory. Guide us by Your Holy Spirit ... that we may not abuse Your blessings nor neglect them until it is too late. Give power to Your Word when we hear it that in contrite and believing hearts we may receive it and by it may be preserved in the faith until we see... our Savior coming to take us to Himself in heaven. ... Amen. (The Devotional Bible, Vol. II, CPH 1948, p. 186)

[Jesus] went on His way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to Him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from Me, all you workers of evil!' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill You." And He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish My course. Nevertheless, I must go on My way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.'"

In Christ Jesus, the door that provides entrance into life eternal, dear fellow redeemed:

Sadly it is typical for us as sinners, even as Jesus' followers, to focus more upon the spiritual fitness of others instead of engaging in a true and honest **self**-examination. At the beginning of the same chapter as our text, Jesus was approached by some on the subject of Pontius Pilate's wicked deed of mixing the blood of some Galilean Jews with their sacrifices. Jesus goes on to ask: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?" Then Jesus answers His own question by redirecting those who had approached by saying: "No, I tell you; but unless YOU repent, YOU will all likewise perish."

We do not know the motivation behind the question posed to Jesus at the beginning of our text: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" But Jesus here also turns the questioner to some salutary self-

analysis by stating: “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” We should also avoid scrutinizing our neighbors’ spiritual condition, instead examine ourselves and take to heart the truth that - **The Narrow Door Accommodates All, Before It Is Shut.**

I

The Door leading into life everlasting is narrow, but it prevents no one from entering. Jesus uses a similar picture in His sermon on the mount: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

At first blush we might think that the narrow door to heaven is intended to be exclusive, but that misses the point. Notice, Jesus commenting on the narrowness of the door, it is not that the many seeking entrance are not allowed, but are unable. All are still welcomed by our Lord. He desires all people to be saved. The narrowness of it is that there is only one way in which we can be saved, elsewhere Jesus speaks of it this way: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

On the other hand the way, which leads to everlasting shame and torment, is most accommodating and therefore is wide. The inability for sinners to enter the narrow door is caused by the conditions insisted upon by the one seeking entrance. There are many who like the idea of Jesus being a helper unto salvation, but He only is viewed as supplemental to their own works and actions. The narrow door into life everlasting does not allow the passage of those who carry the extra baggage of their supposed good works and good qualities. So upon our entrance through that door especially through Holy Baptism we renounce the devil, all his works and all **his WAYS.**

The Canaanite woman in our Gospel, who was a non-Jew was tested by our Lord. Would she try to enter the narrow door with the baggage of her self-righteousness. Jesus declared with her present that He was sent only to the Jews. She did not accuse Jesus of being unfair, rather she pleaded for mercy based on Jesus’ undeserved love. Jesus said more that seemed dismissive by emphasizing how narrow the door is – but she was not phased, she continued to look to Jesus alone and His merciful heart. Her faith in Jesus alone had already allowed her to pass through the door. She was able because it was the work of God that brought her through the door of Jesus.

II

The door of God's grace in Christ stands open, until it is slammed shut at death or if the Last Day occurs before one's death. It will shut for many who were unwilling to drop their own claims to righteousness as though they deserve to enter partly by their own merit. There will be a clamor raised by those shut out, but it will be pointless. They may have spent time with Jesus, like those in His day who feasted with Him and heard His sweet teachings directly from His mouth. Or there may be those today who will say, *"I heard Jesus' teachings in my youth"*, or *"I have dined with Him at the altar"*, but if they do not trust in Him alone those points of contact will not save.

Faithless contact with Jesus does not save. Imagine hearing these words of judgment from our Lord after the door is shut: "I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from Me, all you workers of evil!" In describing what it is like to be shut out, Jesus says: "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out."

Our Lord describes the other place prepared for all people by the perfect sacrifice made for all sinners in this way: "people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God." It will be an eternal feasting with Christ Jesus, our one and only Savior. There will be Jewish believers in the everlasting Kingdom like Mary, the mother of our Lord, the Apostles Paul and Peter, Mary Magdalene – who had been possessed by seven demons, Zachaeus – the tax collector. But also those who were not Jews like the Canaanite woman, the Centurion, and also you my fellow believers will all be safely enclosed inside life everlasting for Jesus' sake alone.

Now we do not know what motivated some Pharisees to warn Jesus about Herod's desire to kill Him. There was at least one Pharisee, Nicodemus, who rightly believed in Jesus as Savior. If the warning came from him, it was a genuinely serious concern. But most often we find Jesus' enemies listed among the Pharisees and it would seem reasonable they were seeking Jesus to leave the Jerusalem territory so that the people would no longer hear Jesus' teachings that challenged their false religion of self-righteousness.

Regardless the motivation of the warning Jesus answers with the firm resolution to do the work His Father sent Him to do, so that all are able to pass through the door to everlasting life. Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death makes Him the blessed door of entrance. On the third day of resurrection, Jesus completed His course of our salvation set before Him by the heavenly Father.

Trusting in Christ Jesus alone for your complete salvation means you have entered the narrow door already with all **YOUR** self-righteous thoughts and actions forgiven. Elsewhere Jesus confidently said this: “whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” This applies to you, my fellow believers right now, already you have passed through the door of life.

We regularly hear after receiving individual absolution the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippian Christians: “I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” The work of our Lord enabling you to pass through the door of everlasting life has begun and trusting in His work alone you are safe for all eternity. You have already been eating and drinking the holy food connected with the presence of your Savior with blessing and even after the door is shut there will be a blessed feasting with Him that knows no end. For now the door stands wide open for all to come. Enter without risk. Amen.