

The Gospel According to Luke

“Guess Who’s Not Coming to Dinner?”

Chapter 13:22-30

Introduction

Do you ever wish you could crash the biggest, most exclusive parties on the planet? Or get in to the premiers of your favorite movies, and meet the celebrities?

Alex Mamlet has done it – many times over. He’s crashed parties and premieres, and hung out with the likes of Tom Cruise, Steven Spielberg, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Ben Affleck, and many, many others.

How does he do it? Mamlet employs a variety of finely honed techniques to skirt past security, such as the "cell phone bum rush," "the upside-down guest list," "the wine glass in hand" and "the fake pass" with "the quick show." Mamlet has also used a variety of costume disguises just to get inside a big star party. He's dressed as anything from a chef and a janitor to a security guard and a hip-hop DJ. He even has a super secret party-crashing kit, complete with different-colored laminated badges, wristbands, different-colored markers, walkie-talkies and cell phones.

There are some party-crashers in our story. They are unable to get in to the banquet – **even though they had been invited!** In their case, they waited too long to get in, and the door was permanently shut.

The banquet in this Bible passage represents salvation and eternal life. There is an open invitation, to everyone; but there is a time in everyone’s life when it is too late to respond. The door is shut forever; and this is one party you will not be able to crash with your secret party-crashing kit!

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Today You Can Strive To Enter The Open Gate And Be Received, but #2 One Day You Will Seek To Enter The Shut Door And Be Refused.

#1 Today You Can Strive To Enter
The Open Gate And Be Received
(v22-24)

This is a scary section of Scripture, on the surface. It's just as scary below the surface – as we will see by digging in to it. But we need to know what it's about before we jump to conclusions.

From a quick, first reading, it sounds as though it's teaching that you may not get in to heaven unless you work really hard at it your whole life. Even then, you might be refused entrance.

Salvation is not attained by your works; and it is not maintained by your works. It is, from start to finish, the free gift of the grace of God.

So, just what is going on in these verses? It's very Jewish. That is not to say it has no application for us; it does, and we will see it. But first and foremost, it was about the Jews, and their ideas about salvation. You see, a first century Jew believed that he was saved by *birth* and by *background*:

1. He believed he was saved by birth, simply because the Jews were God's chosen people.
2. He believed he was saved by background, because he could trace his religion back to guys like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The questioner asked Jesus, [Are there few who are saved?](#) It seems he wanted Jesus to clarify whether or not all Jews were automatically saved, and whether or not all non-Jews were automatically lost.

Jesus' answer was that Jews were privileged to know the way of salvation, but were not saved by birth or background; and that multitudes of non-Jews could and would be saved, despite their birth and background.

We pick up the story in verse twenty-four, where Jesus said,

Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

We have our own ideas about what the **narrow gate** means or represents. I again ask you to think Jewish; to put on your *yarmulke* (ya – mi – kah). To a Jew, the **narrow gate** referred to the single entrance to the Old Testament Tabernacle and, later, the Temple. It was called a **gate** (Exodus 27). If you wanted to approach God, to have a relationship with Him, you had to enter by that **gate**. There was no other way. Only one way led to God.

The word **strive** is a term you would encounter on Sports Center. It's an athletic term. It describes the conviction of a dedicated athlete who trains and trains and trains in order to qualify for their event. In our context, it meant that you could only qualify for salvation by coming through the **narrow gate**.

Up to this point, it sounds like Jesus was saying you had to be a Jew to be saved. The Jews had been blessed with many privileges, not the least of which was the Law of God and the system of sacrifice in the Temple that permitted a person to approach God.

So, then, are all Jews were saved? **Nope!** Jesus quickly added, **for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able**. That statement would shock a Jew. How could they have the narrow gate, but not be able to enter?

We'll see that in a moment. First, I want to linger on this point. We look around and see the world's great religions. It can give us a sense that there are different paths we can take, different doors we can enter, to get in to heaven.

Millions of people watched the funeral, or a portion of it, for Pope John-Paul II. Religious leaders, from the world's great religions, were there. It gave the impression that Catholicism was a way to God, a door to heaven; but so was Judaism, or Islam, or the others.

There was, and there is, only one way to God. There are not many ways; there are not many doors. That one way is biblical Christianity; that one way is to believe on Jesus Christ.

Don't be fooled. God established the one way of salvation right at the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve sinned; God did two things to restore them:

1. He killed an animal or two, probably lambs, showing them that sin could only be forgiven by the death of an innocent substitute taking your place.
2. Then He promised to come Himself, as a man, God in human flesh, to be your substitute and take your place.

The Jewish religion, with its **narrow gate** into the Tabernacle, was symbolic. It taught you that there was only one way to God – the way He prescribed in the Garden of Eden – the way of sacrifice. It's furnishings and rituals expanded your understanding of what He had established in the Garden of Eden. They were intended only to point you to Jesus when He came. He was the fulfillment of everything God had previously taught about salvation. Jesus **was** the **narrow gate**; He was and is the **door** to salvation, the only way to get to heaven. He died, in your place, as your Substitute, as the final lamb – the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.

When the text here says, **strive to enter through the narrow gate**, it means you can only qualify for salvation by believing on Jesus. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone.

Anytime Jesus is preached, the **narrow gate** is open, and unbelievers of any ethnic birth and of every conceivable background, can **strive to enter** and be saved for eternity.

Now, back to the first century. Jesus went on to tell His Jewish listeners, **for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able**. He explained what He meant by telling a story, were we learn,

#2 One Day You Will Seek To Enter The Shut Door And Be Refused (v25-30)

This was shocking! The Jews were sure that their birth and background qualified them for heaven. A lot of people still feel this way. I know I did, growing up. As an Italian Roman Catholic, who

had been baptized as an infant, received first holy communion, then confirmation – ***I was in!***

A lot of people who attend Protestant Churches believe their heritage saves them. Some think that by being in the 'right' Church, that teaches the 'right' doctrine, they are saved. Others believe that they were born saved by being born into the right family. They, too, have been baptized as infants, and had a type of confirmation service. But they are not all saved!

This story is about all such people. It is among the saddest, most tragic, in all the Word of God. Think of it – millions of people who are going through their lives, trusting in their birth or background; in all the world's religions; many even in Christian Churches; who, in the end, will be lost forever and spend eternity in Hell.

Jesus switched, in mid-sentence, from those who **strive** now to enter, to those who will **seek** later to get in. Strive now means to come to God His way, through faith in Jesus. For those who do not come God's way, there is coming a day when it will be too late for them. Instead of the open **narrow gate**, they will encounter the **shut door**.

Luke 13:25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

Luke 13:26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

The scene is a great banquet. It's a great picture of salvation, this banquet. We love to eat, and get together with friends over a meal. Imagine the joy of dining with Jesus in heaven. There, too, are all the believers, from all time – including many friends and family you have said "Goodbye" to in this life.

The emphasis in the story is on those outside who cannot enter. When is it too late to get into heaven?

1. It's too late once you die. There is no chance, after death, to be saved. I sincerely wish there were. **It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this... judgment** (Hebrews 9:27).

2. It may be too late after the Rapture, for those who have heard about Jesus, but refused. The Rapture is the return of Jesus in the clouds to catch-away the believers of the Church Age. Those who have died will rise first; then we who are alive and remain will be immediately transformed and caught-away to join them in the air. There is a section of Scripture, in Second Thessalonians (2:11) that describes those who are left behind, who have heard but have rejected Jesus prior to the Great Tribulation, as believing **the lie** and being lost for eternity. Millions will be saved during that awful time on earth, those last seven years; but it may only be those who have never heard the Gospel previously.

Listen carefully: You do not know when you are going to die; and you do not know when the Rapture of the Church will occur. Both events are imminent: You could die any moment; Jesus could return any moment.

If you have not entered by the **narrow gate**... The **door** will be **shut**!

The people in Jesus' story acted like they knew Him. They did – but not in a way that saved them. They trusted in birth or background. We know they did, because Jesus went on to say,

Luke 13:27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

Luke 13:28 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, and yourselves thrust out.

The people Jesus was addressing could claim **birth** as a ticket to the banquet. They were descended from **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**.

They could claim their **background** as a ticket to the banquet. They had the **prophets** in their background – meaning that they were members of the true religion that had been revealed by God through the **prophets** to them.

Birth and background could not, and do not, save anyone. Birth and background are great privileges, for sure. But you must believe for yourself and be born-again. And you must realize that your

background is that you are dead in your trespasses and sins, with no hope of heaven, apart from faith in Jesus.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth is what goes on for eternity, in Hell. You will not only be refused entrance into heaven; you will be **thrust out**, into Hell.

If you were a Jew listening to Jesus – Just when you thought it couldn't possibly get any worse, He added,

Luke 13:29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

People coming from these directions, from all over the earth, were non-Jews! They were Gentiles – who most Jews felt could not be saved at all. They would be saved – while Jews would be lost!

By the way: It's been pointed out that the spread of the Gospel, by the disciples, went in these directions, starting **east**, then going **west**, **north** and **south** (Ryle).

The **first** refers to the Jews, who had the privileges of the Law, the covenants, the Tabernacle, and many other things to show them the way to God was by grace through faith. The **last** were the Gentiles, to whom God would reveal His Son, Jesus Christ.

It isn't that Jews and Gentiles were going to change places in line; the **first** would be shut-out, while the **last** would be let in.

Applying the Word

Jesus did something important in His response to the question posed to Him. He made it personal. The questioner asked, "*Will the saved be few?*" Jesus responded, "*Will the saved be **you?***"

Believers become like this questioner. They argue over the exact order of salvation. They argue over the exact content of the Gospel. There is a place for such argument; there is a need for sharpening

doctrine, and for the study of theology. In the last decade, however, I have watched whole Churches implode and divide over such arguments. I know of Christians who stand outside of evangelistic crusades, like the Harvest Crusades, and pass out literature that claims the Gospel was not really proclaimed.

There is another movement among Churches, somewhat the opposite. Churches have become what they call “seeker-sensitive.” They are *sensitive* to the felt needs of those *seeking* spirituality. It sounds good; and these Churches are often the fastest growing in the community. But most of the time they are not confronting seekers with their need for salvation. That would be too insensitive. The Word of God is taught less and less – because it is thought that seekers do not have the attention span to listen to it.

Jesus was **seeker-insensitive** – at least in these verses! It’s not the ‘felt needs’ of seekers we should concentrate on, but their real need: Salvation.

Unbelievers have their questions and arguments. What about the pygmy in Africa? What about the theory of evolution? How can a God Who is love send people to Hell? Why do people suffer if God is almighty? The list is endless.

All their questions could be summarized by the question, *Will the saved be few?* To all of their questions, Jesus would say, *Will the saved be **you?***

You have a birth and a background. Every one of us is born dead in our sins; our backgrounds are full of sins – of falling short of being perfect.

You can be born-again. Your background can be wiped clean by the forgiveness of your sins. Today you can qualify by simply entering through the **narrow gate**. Tomorrow the **door**, for you at least, might be **shut** forever.