

Taking God Seriously

by Peter Masters

The sermon emphasizes the difficulty of entering God's kingdom due to our twisted-up attitudes and the need to come to God alone, but promises a great change of life and spiritual understanding for those who pass through the gate of salvation.

Duration: 34:34

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Matthew 11:28, Luke 13:24, John 14:6, Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Salvation Transformation", "Christian Accountability"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding what lies beyond the gate of salvation. He explains that the first thing that happens when someone goes through the gate and accepts Jesus Christ is a transformation. Although they are not immediately made perfect, they become a better person. The preacher then refers to Luke 13:24, where Jesus instructs believers to strive and struggle to enter through the narrow gate. He highlights the difficulty of finding the Lord and encourages listeners to take God seriously. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the significance of Christ's sacrifice for sinners and the need for humans to recognize their fallen state and accountability to God.

Transcript

I'm turning now to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13, and verse 24. The Gospel of Luke, chapter 13, verse 24, the words of Christ, Strive to enter in at the straight gate. For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

The subject is that of, quite simply, taking God seriously. Is it easy to find the Lord? Is it easy, or is it difficult? This verse implies that it is difficult. Strive to enter in at the straight gate.

Strive, the Greek original literally is agonize. Struggle, the word agonize comes directly from the Greek word employed here. Fight, the word has to do with contending.

It's a word that would be used in the great public games of gladiators and wrestlers. Strive, agonize, strain to enter in at the straight gate. Now this is very strange, because elsewhere the New Testament is at pains to get us to understand that it is very easy to come to God.

And you remember how the Lord Jesus Christ, in those very famous words, said, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And he went on to say, For my yoke is easy, and

my burden is light. And there were so many sentiments indicating the same thing.

The Lord said, Ask, seek, knock, as if to mean you only have to ask. It is as easy as knocking, and the door opens. Trust only, there is the great doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Not by works, we do not have to earn the salvation of God, we cannot do so. It would be hopeless if we had to earn anything. No, we are justified, that is to say we are made acceptable to God through faith.

Through trusting in Christ, who suffered and died to bear the punishment of our sin, and who has lived a perfect life in order to earn for us all the blessings of God. We cannot atone for our own sin, we would be everlastingly punished, and we cannot earn the blessings of God. Oh, there is that great word which occurs so many times in the Bible, and it is grace that salvation is by grace.

That is to say, it is undeserved and it is unearned. So how do you enter God's kingdom? How do you become a child of God? How does your life be changed and brought in conformity with Him? How are you related to Him? Well, freely, by grace. And yet there are these words that appear to contradict that.

Strive, agonize, struggle to enter in at the straight gate. An old-fashioned word, the straight gate, meaning of course the narrow gate. We have the term just about lingering on in geography.

We talk about the Menai Strait up there at the top of Wales and so on. A narrow piece of water joining together two larger pieces of water or seas. But otherwise the word has virtually disappeared.

Actually the Greek there is in the English, stenosis, which means to say, well, the doctors use it anyway, when they want to describe the narrowing of a blood vessel or something of that kind. The narrow gate. So you have to struggle to enter it, and it is a very narrow gate.

Narrow gates, what were they for in ancient times? Well, they were so that people could only get in one at a time. And the experts tell us they were used in animal husbandry, when they were breeding and so on. There would be a very narrow gate so that the larger animals couldn't get through.

But the younger animals could get through to another pen and all this sort of thing. So the narrow gate, a shifting device, a separating device. And this implies difficulty in coming to Christ and getting into the Kingdom of God.

So is it easy or is it hard? That's what we want to know. Well, in one way it's very easy, as I've said. Of course it's easy.

I do not have to earn the favour of God. I do not have to take the punishment for my own sins. Christ has come to pay the price for me if I trust in Him and believe in Him.

And He will give me these blessings freely. Almost impossibly hard for Him to secure my salvation but easy for me. But there are some aspects in coming to Christ which are difficult.

Not that we earn any favour by going through these things which are difficult. They're difficult only because of us, only because of our sin. Opening that gate, that gate into the Kingdom of God is easy.

But for us it is difficult for various reasons. And I'll talk about these very briefly this evening. First of all, a small narrow gate.

What does it suggest to you? You're going along, in olden times, a major highway. Maybe you're going somewhere. Well, did you want to go some big town, some grand place? And along the highway there, there was a small inconspicuous gate.

What does it mean? Smallness seems to discredit it. It is easily underestimated and despised. Where does a little gate like that lead to? What can that do for me? I don't want to go through there.

I'll keep on my route to somewhere pretty splendid which I head for. So size, you want size. That indicates glamour, promise, something good and wealthy.

But this narrow gate which is the entry point into the Kingdom of God, well, it's easily despised. And it's a narrow gate and few seem to be taking it in this day and age. The majority of people currently in our city do not seem to be going through this narrow gate into the Kingdom of God.

And so maybe we despise it for that. It's inconspicuous. It's not surrounded by bright lights, things that would attract us.

Eternity seems far off. It's like an inconspicuous gate. Eternity, maybe you're young, seems such a long way away.

If it's there, any prospect of eternity. Spiritual things are unseen. These preachers, this Bible, it's talking about the invisible God.

It's talking about receiving spiritual life which is an invisible commodity. It's talking about things I don't understand. It's like a conspicuous gate.

It means nothing to me and I underestimate it. And now there are people who say the world wasn't even created by a God. Everything can be explained in terms of science.

Well, it can't be, of course, but that's the idea that many people have. So this gate is an irrelevance. A gate to the Kingdom of God? Where can such a small gate lead? So this is one reason why the gate is difficult for us to enter because we are brainwashed and programmed into underestimating the gateway to God's Kingdom and life with Him.

And that's all got to be changed. And you know it won't be changed unless you start by doing some thinking. I'm sorry to sound like a schoolmaster, but you've got to think about these things.

Why the complexity of your very being as a person. The person you are and all your emotions and your thoughts and your ideas. You are such a complex being, not only bodily but in your mental, emotional makeup.

Where did you come from? Chance forces? You are distinctive from any other person. You are you. Just think about yourself.

And as soon as you begin to think, well, there revives in you this awareness that there is a Creator God and you're made for some purpose. You're not just an animal. Think of the human race and how distinctive it is from all the other animals.

You notice what happens these days. There are certain people are so determined to try to prove that human beings are just higher primates, just a little better than most of the animals, that as soon as

somebody comes up with the idea that an animal somewhere can talk or communicate, we think we can observe that there is some primeval two or three words of language in this creature. So there's no difference between higher animals and human beings.

Well, of course, the more they try to convince us of this, the more obvious the gulf is. You can prove that an animal has a few thoughts and a limited, primitive method of communication. What does that prove? Only the greatness of the gulf between the most complex animals and human beings.

Why, there's all the difference in the world. But how do you explain, with half the scientific world desperately trying to find evidence of a connection and missing links and so on, how do you explain the human race? According to the scriptures, made by God for him, altogether higher than the animals, with the power of reason and creativity and language and living souls and a knowledge of right and wrong. As soon as you think about these things, then you find yourself realizing you are created.

You're a member of this special human race. You're accountable to God. We just need to think.

Think of the conscience, the great mystery of the conscience, that knowledge of right from wrong and yet unable to keep that conscience because we're fallen from God's favor. We are a noble race, but we've fallen from communion and favor with God through our rebellion and our sinfulness. So many things we could talk about.

You've only got to think of these things for a while and no longer do you buy the idea there is no God, there is no specialness to human beings, there is no accountability to him, there is nothing divine, nothing deeper than material life. No, just think, friends. It is difficult in this respect to come into the kingdom of God through that gate because it's so despised by so many and it's so inconspicuous.

But once you think, well then, it's an important gate. But here's a second reason why we underestimate it or it's hard for us to take this gate. Simply, it is the gate of repentance and renewal.

How do you get into the kingdom? Through this gate which filters us out. We can only come through one at a time. We have to individually make our peace with God.

And what is it? It's a gate of repentance and a gate through which we go to be completely changed and transformed, to receive a new nature and to get this life in the soul. Well, it's not wanted by us, all that. To get into the kingdom of God, I have to be humble before him and acknowledge my sinfulness, how far away I am from him, and acknowledge my need of transformation.

I don't want to think like that. I'm not condemned, I'm not a fallen creature. I'm a good person, at least I'm better than many others.

I would not be condemned by God. We have these big ideas about ourselves. We don't see our sinfulness, how far from God we are, and we don't want to.

So this is another hard aspect of going through the gate into the kingdom. We're so proud of ourselves and we're so reluctant to humble ourselves before him and see our need of complete forgiveness. And then there are other things.

We've got so much baggage on us to get through this gate, this narrow gate. My opinions, I'm so pleased with them. I think so much of them.

I don't want to be told I've got to get rid of so many of my opinions and listen to the word of God, listen to what God says about us. My ideas, my self-determination, doing exactly what I want to do, when I want to do it, I'm not going to let that go. I can't go through the gate then, and it's quite hard for me to let that go.

My selfish ambitions and my doubts and my love of certain sinful pleasures, and all these things are the baggage that has to drop off when we go through the gate of repentance as we approach to God for salvation. And it's hard for us to do that because we love these things. We're attached to these things.

So you see, the gate swings open very easily. In most respects, it is easy to go through. Christ has done it all to deal with the problem of our sin and earn heaven for us.

We have a Saviour in Him, and yet because of our twisted-up attitudes, it's very hard to approach that gate until we drop some of these things. That's the point, I'm sure, that the Lord Jesus Christ was making. I have to throw off my rotten pride, throw off my rebellion, throw off all my selfish ideas and rights and my love of sin, and come through that gate and ask God to forgive me.

And I have to depend upon Him. But here's the third thing that makes it difficult. It is the gate of individual access, one at a time.

And for many people, that's hard, and I'll tell you why. You see, there are many people who have never really performed an individual act in their lives. They go with the crowd.

They move with a party of people. They don't do anything alone. What are my tastes? What do I enjoy? What do I wear? What do I do? I do what other people do.

I go where other people go. This gate calls me to come through as an individual and to come to God and to come on my own account and make my peace with Him and repent of my sin and ask for new life. Never done that so often.

It's an interesting thing that while the devil, I hope you believe there's a personal devil, he whispers in your ear, Oh, act as an individual. Don't listen to that preacher. Do your own thing.

Act as an individual. But most of the time we never act as individuals. We act as we're brainwashed to act.

We act as the crowd act. We do the popular thing. And this is a gate you cannot come through with others, just one at a time.

You know, I think that disciple, the apostle, Peter, was rather like this, though he was a very forward sort of person. He'd been a fisherman. He'd worked in his own business, member of a team, owned a business with another disciple, but really a team player, even though he was very impetuous and forward.

And isn't it interesting, the Lord called him to follow Him three times. It took three calls, three separate calls, before Peter fell on his knees and effectively repented of his sin and came through that gate of salvation into Christ. And I think the great reluctance with him is he'd never really done anything alone of his own bet.

You've got to consider your own life that God has given you. You've got to consider what you're doing with your own soul. You've got to consider your individual personal destiny and what you're living for.

And you've got to come through this gate alone. And if you've got a bunch of friends around you who are going to laugh you to scorn, are going to look at you as though you've gone mad, no, you do this by yourself. And that's hard for us.

Sometimes we're so subject to the crowd around us. I have to jettison all that dependence upon others and go to Christ and repent of my sin and ask Him to save me. But here's another thing that makes it difficult.

This is the gate to eternal life. You can't very easily see what's beyond that gate. Let's imagine it's a tall gate for all the fact that it's narrow.

This has a sign on it. This is the gate to eternal life. But you can't see eternal life.

A reluctance to go through that gate because I don't know where it leads. It's a kind of fear of the unknown. I like the sound of a lot of this, that my sins can be forgiven and I can go to heaven and I can know God and I can be a better person.

But I'm afraid of the unknown. What exactly will it be like? What exactly will happen to me? We cannot see where it leads. Well, this is where the Bible comes in.

And if you don't mind me saying it, this is where the preacher comes in. Our job is to say, I will now tell you what's behind this gate, where it leads. I will try to describe it to you, exactly what will happen and what will be your possession and your future beyond this gate.

And I have to say this, that one of the first things is if you go through this gate and you seek Jesus Christ and you believe in Him and trust in Him and what He's done for sinners and you give your life to Him and repent of your sin, the first thing that happens to you when you go through that gate is you're changed. You are changed. And you're changed for the better.

You're not made a perfect person. You will one day be made a perfect person if you trust in Christ, when you go into eternal glory. But you're not immediately made a perfect person, but you're made a much better person.

And you know I often say these things, but if you're a mean person, maybe you'll become a generous person. If you're someone who can't stop lying, well, God will give you your integrity and you'll have power over your tongue and your thoughts. Whatever your problem is, if you've got a dirty mind, and I'm sorry to put it like that, it will become a clean mind and you'll value things immensely.

You'll be clean. There'll be so many changes in you. If you're a violent, ill-tempered person, God will take it away.

If you're addicted to terrible things, God will help you and cure you. This is what lies beyond that gate, a great change of life. But even more wonderful, you'll be given spiritual life.

You'll be able to pray. You'll have a certainty and assurance come into you that your prayers are getting through, that God is listening to you, that you belong to Him and your sins are forgiven. You'll know this within yourself very deeply.

It's wonderful things lie beyond this gateway. Suddenly you'll understand. Oh, I don't know about coming to Christ, you say.

I find so many things difficult to get hold of in the Bible. I don't understand so much of what is the world about and what's going on and why do people behave as they do and everything is confusing. But once you get through that gate, it becomes much clearer why you're here, what the purpose of God is, what's the matter with the world, and you understand the Bible so much more.

Why it's tremendous what happens. I can't promise you that you'll understand everything, even in your entire life. Everything will become much more wonderful.

You'll still struggle with some of the deeper books of the Bible, but you'd be amazed how much instant understanding and comprehension is given to people who come through this gate of salvation. There are tremendous changes, and of course you'll walk with God and he'll prove himself to you. He delights to do that.

He'll answer your prayers and bless you. You'll have influence for good in the lives of many others. And then when it comes towards the end of life's journey, you'll know where you're going and you'll have the experience one day of being transported from time into eternity and you'll be ushered in to the presence of Almighty God into that glorious paradise for the Lord's people.

These are the things that lie beyond that gate. This is the gate that leads to life, if only I could get it across to you. What lies beyond, you'd have no fear of it.

You'd have deep desire for it. Well, these are some of the reasons why this gate is hard for us to pass through, why I want you to imagine there is a great sign over this narrow gate. The Son of God died here for sinners.

That's the most important thing. Christ, eternal God, equal with the Father, took upon himself a body and humbled himself and came into this world. He didn't leave off being God.

He was still God. Yes, spiritually, in his spiritual divine being, he was still everywhere in the universe and yet wonderfully he entered in to a human body and a human personality and came to be our representative to suffer the penalty of sin that was due to us. There's the sign on this gate.

This is the gateway to real life. This is the gateway to heaven. This is the gate to purpose and meaning in life.

This is the gate to eternity, and so it is. You must come through this gate or that you'd have a sense of God, a sense of his might and majesty and eternity, his sublime holiness, and yet his pardoning love. If you will only come through this gate, the gate of Jesus Christ, if only we could have a view of the shallowness of life, if we stay outside this gate, if only we could have a realization of the fact that we're slaves to trivia and passing and little things, Christ's purchase of his people, what Christ has done.

It's amazing. It's wonderful. However you look at it, Calvary love.

That's a beautiful term, that he came to suffer and die upon that cross of Calvary. What heroism beyond any human heroism. Remember some years ago? It's a long time ago now.

It was an aircraft crashed into a bridge in Washington in America there over the Potomac River, and we were reading about the desperate attempts to rescue people. It was the middle of winter. It was icy.

There was one man in particular who put his life at risk to dive repeatedly into the icy water, and he was regarded as such a hero. What courage that takes when you know your own survival is very unlikely to rescue person after person. And we've read of people who've run into searing flames in order to rescue others, knowing full well that if they survived, they'd be hideously, horrendously burned.

What courage is that? Oh, there are some amazing instances of human courage, but the divine courage, the courage of the Saviour when he came to that highest agony of God to be nailed to Calvary's cross, allowing himself to be taken and crucified so that God the Father could almost, let's say, veil in his face so great was his love for his Son laid upon Christ, upon his body, upon his soul. That eternal, horrible weight of punishment, we cannot conceive it, punished him instead of us. Christ, who was God, knew exactly what it would feel like to adopt human flesh and go through that, the heroism of Christ, our sin upon him.

Oh, friends, our time is almost out. Think of this gateway of salvation. It's a narrow gate.

There you are in a crowd, and you're moving along that old-time highway, going to somewhere you think it's splendid. It's going to be everything to you. And you see this gate.

Well, let me tell you the difference. Keep on the highway of this world, living for the here and now, just living for material things, this limited, short life. Keep on.

Your soul will remain dead. Come through this relatively inconspicuous gate, the gate of salvation, and your soul comes fully to life. That's the difference.

You carry on the main highway. You're guilty before God. You're condemned.

One day you must be judged. Turn through this inconspicuous gate. Jesus Christ died here for sinners, and your guilt rolls away, and you receive the pardon of God, which will never be taken away from you.

Keep on the highway. You're decaying. You're decaying two ways.

You're decaying physically. You're aging. You haven't got all that many years.

And you're decaying spiritually, because morally you're decaying too. You're bad now. We all are.

But you'll get worse, harder, more compromised, meaner as life goes on. You go through this gate. You will be completely renewed and wonderfully changed.

Keep on the highway. You'll be restless throughout life. You'll enjoy what you can, and you'll have your pleasures, but you'll have your trials and your problems, and many of them go through this gate.

You have peace with God, and the most important thing, your relationship with Almighty God is settled and resolved. You'll have peace with God. Keep on the highway.

You'll be cheated time and time again, as many robbers on that highway, many people who will steal and plunder from you. You'll pay dearly for so many things. You'll set your heart on certain things you want to achieve, and maybe you'll be passed over for promotion, or you'll be made redundant, or you'll have terrible illness, enter into your family circle, or you'll make a bad marriage, or something will go wrong.

It's bound to do sooner or later, and the world will not keep its promises to you that you'll be blissfully happy. It'll break most of them, but you go through that inconspicuous gate of salvation, and you'll find all

the promises of God will be kept. You will receive everything the Bible says you will receive.

God is faithful and perfect. Well, stay on the highway, ugliness comes into your life, go through the gateway of salvation. That's the life of beauty, and ultimately the beauty of eternal bliss.

Stay on the highway, it's pettiness and feuding, it's the rat race of life, it's triviality and banality, and failure after failure. Go through that inconspicuous gate, and you have depth in your being. You're a profound person, and you're significant, and you have, as I mentioned, eternal influence.

You'll bring others through that gate. You'll affect the lives of others for good, and they will receive, too, eternal blessing. Maybe your children, your husband, your wife, your friends.

It happens all the time. Anyone who goes through that gateway of salvation is given an eternal influence in the lives of many others. Stay on the highway, massive expense, it'll cost you your youth, it'll cost you so much.

Go through the gate of salvation, everything is free, everything comes freely from Almighty God to you. Stay on the highway, it's a life of confusion for you. Go through the gate of salvation, it's knowledge.

Stay on the highway, condemnation, through the gate of salvation to heaven. Why? The differences are enormous. Look at this 24th verse, what a wonderful verse.

Strive to enter in at the straight gate, it's easy, it's free, it's just our bad attitudes we've got to jettison. For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able, what a tragedy, to refuse that gate until you die and then you want it, but it's too late. Then you're going into eternity, you've left it too late.

It's hard in some ways because it's so easily underestimated. Do you underestimate the way of salvation? It's hard in some ways because it's a gate of repentance and renewal and our pride is so great that's offensive to us. It's hard because it's the gate of individual access and we just move with the crowd led by the nose.

And for the first time in our lives we've got to act really as individuals when we come through the gate of salvation. It's hard because you're scared of what's beyond it, what it'll lead to. Oh, nothing to be afraid of, nothing but the blessing of God and all the powerful help of God.

But let's just conclude with the ease. It's so easy. Lift the latch of the gate.

It's so easy. It's prayer. You just come to God and you say, Lord, I've been a fool and a sinner.

I want to repent of all my sin. Lord, I want help from Thee. I want salvation and a changed life.

I want to be a child of God and I will give this life of mine, rotten as it is, and give it to Thee. Oh, Lord, change me and forgive me and save me and take me. I trust in Jesus Christ that He has paid the price for me.

Lift that latch. Don't look round at your friends. Don't look round to see what others may be thinking of you.

This is your great individual act. Lift the latch. Swing the gate.

It's a narrow gate. One great advantage of a narrow gate is it's light. There's no weight to it.

It's not like dragging open one of these wide gates into a field. It will yield to your very touch and Christ will receive you and bless you and make you His own. You must go through that straight, that narrow gate or life and eternity for you is lost.

So trust yourself to the love of God and the work of Christ and come. Let's pray together. Oh, God, our gracious Heavenly Father, look upon us all, we pray, and help us to see the importance and the significance, the urgency of these things.

Oh, Lord, work a work in every heart as we go our separate ways. Lord, prevent it that these things should fade in our mind and this world should swallow us up again and take all our attention and all our lives. Lord, bless us and help us and save men and women, young people we ask.

We ask it in the name of our Saviour for His sake. Amen.

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