**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-052**. **THE STRAIT GATE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"22. And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23. Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them, 24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not he able. 25. 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: 26. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. 27. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity. 28. 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. 29. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. 30. And, behold, there are last which shall be first and there are first which shall be last."*

*Luke 13:22-30*

Are there few that be saved?The questioner's temper and motives may be inferred from the tone of Christ's answer, which turns attention from a mere piece of speculative curiosity to the grave personal aspect of the condition of salvation, and the possibility of missing it. Whether few or many went in, there would be many left out, and among these some of the listeners. Jesus speaks to them, the multitude, not to the questioner. The men who approach solemn subjects lightly, and use them as material for raising profitless questions for the sake of getting religious teachers in a corner, exist still, and are best answered after Christ's manner.

Of course, the speaker meant by being savedparticipation in Messiah's kingdom, regarded in the carnal Jewish fashion; and our Lord's reply is primarily directed to setting forth the condition of entrance into that kingdom, as the Jew expected it to be manifested on earth. But behind that immediate reference lies a solemn unveiling of the conditions of salvation in its deepest meaning, and of the danger of exclusion from it.

**I. We note, first, the all-important exhortation with which Christ seeks to sober a frivolous curiosity.**

In its primary application, the strait gatemay be taken to be the lowliness of the Messiah, and the consequent sharp contrast of His kingdom with Jewish high-flown and fleshly hopes. The passage to the promised royalty was not through a great portal worthy of a palace, but by a narrow, low-browed wicket, through which it took a man trouble to squeeze. For us, the narrow gate is the self-abandonment and self-accusation which are indispensable for entrance into salvation.

The door of faithis a narrow one; for it lets no self-righteousness, no worldly glories, no dignities, through. Like the Emperor at Canossa, we are kept outside till we strip ourselves of crowns and royal robes, and stand clothed only in the hair-shirt of penitence. Like Milton's rebel angels entering their council chamber, we must make ourselves small to get in. We must creep on our knees, so low is the vault; we must leave everything outside, so narrow is it. We must go in one by one, as in the turnstiles at a place of entertainment. The door opens into a palace, but it is too strait for any one who trusts to himself.

There must be effort in order to enter by it. For everything in our old self-confident, self-centred nature is up in arms against the conditions of entrance. We are not saved by effort, but we shall not believe without effort. The main struggle of our whole lives should be to cultivate self-humbling trust in Jesus Christ, and to fight the good fight of faith.

**II. We note the reason for the exhortation.**

It is briefly given in verse 24 (last clause), and both parts of the reason there are expanded in the following verses. Effort is needed for entrance, because many are shut out. The questioner would be no better for knowing whether few would enter, but he and all need to burn in on their minds that many will not.

Very solemnly significant is the difference between striving and seeking. It is like the difference between wishing and willing. There may be a seeking which has no real earnestness in it, and is not sufficiently determined, to do what is needful in order to find. Plenty of people would like to possess earthly good, but cannot brace themselves to needful work and sacrifice. Plenty would like to go to heaven, as they understand the phrase, but cannot screw themselves to the surrender of self and the world. Vagrant, half-hearted seeking, such as one sees many examples of, will never win anything, either in this world or in the other. We must strive, and not only seek.

That is true, even if we do not look beyond time; but Jesus carries our awed vision onwards to the end of the days, in the expansion of his warning, which follows in verses 25-27. No doubt, the words had a meaning for His hearers in reference to the Messianic kingdom, and a fulfilment in the rejection of the nation. But we have to discern in them a further and future significance.

Observe that the scene suggested differs from the similar parable of the virgins waiting for their Lord, in that it does not describe a wedding feast. Here it is a householder already in his house, and, at the close of the day, locking up for the night. Some of his servants have not returned in time, have not come in through the narrow gate, which is now not only narrow, but closed by the master's own hand. The translation of that is that, by a decisive act of Christ's in the future, the time for entrance will he ended. As in reference to each stage of life, specific opportunities are given in it for securing specific results, and these can never be recovered if the stage is past; so mortal life, as a whole, is the time for entrance, and if it is not used for that purpose, entrance is impossible. If the youth will not learn, the man will be ignorant. If the sluggard will not plough because the weather is cold, he will beg in harvest. If we do not strive to enter at the gate, it is vain to seek entrance when the Master's own hand has barred it.

The language of our Lord here seems to shut us up to the conclusion that life is the time in which we can gain our entrance. It is no kindness to suggest that perhaps He does not shut the door quite fast. We know, at all events, that it is wide open now.

The words put into the mouths of the excluded sufficiently define their characters, and the reasons why they sought in vain. Why did they want to be in? Because they wished to get out of the cold darkness into the warm light of the bountiful house. But they neither knew the conditions of entrance nor had they any desire after the true blessings within. Their deficiencies are plainly marked in their pleas for admission. At first, they simply ask for entrance, as if thinking that to wish was to have. Then, when the Householder says that He knows nothing about them, and cannot let strangers in, they plead as their qualification that they had eaten and drunk in His presence, and that He had taught in their streets. In these words, the relations of Christ's contemporaries are described, and their immediate application to them is plain.

Outward connection with Jesus gave no claim to share in His kingdom. We have to learn the lesson which we who live amidst a widely diffused, professing Christianity sadly need. No outward connection with Christ, in Christian ordinances or profession, will avail to establish a claim to have the door opened for us. A man may be a most respectable and respected church-member, and have listened to Christian teaching all his days, and have in life a vague wish to be saved, and yet be hopelessly unfit to enter, and therefore irremediably shut out.

The Householder's answer, in its severity and calmness, indicates the inflexible impossibility of opening to such seekers. It puts stress on two things--the absence of any vital relationship between Him and them, and their moral character. He knows nothing about them, and not to be known by the Master of the house is necessarily to be shut out from His household. They are known of the Shepherd who know Him and hear His voice. They who are not must stay in the desert. Such mutual knowledge is the basis of all righteousness, and righteousness is the essential condition of entrance.

These seekers are represented as still working iniquity. They had not changed their moral nature. They wished to enter heaven, but they still loved evil. How could they come in, even if the door had been open? Let us learn that, while faith is the door, without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The worker of iniquity has only an outward relation to Jesus. Inwardly he is separated from Him, and, at last, the outward relation will be adjusted to the inward, and departure from Him will be inevitable, and that is ruin.

**III. Boldly and searchingly personal as the preceding words had been, the final turn of Christ's answer must have had a still sharper and more distasteful edge.**

He had struck a blow at Jewish trust in outward connection with Messiah as ensuring participation in His kingdom. He now says that the Gentiles shall fill the vacant places. Many Jews will be unable to enter, for all their seeking, but still there will be many saved; for troops of hated Gentiles shall come from every corner of the earth, and the sight of them sitting beside the fathers of the nation, while Israel after the flesh is shut out, will move the excluded to weeping--the token of sorrow, which yet has in it no softening nor entrance-securing effect, because it passes into gnashing of teeth, the sign of anger. Such sorrow worketh death.

Such fierce hatred, joined with stiff-necked obstinacy, has characterised the Jew ever since Jerusalem fell. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Israel was first, and has become last. The same causes which sent it from the van to the rear have worked like effects in Christendom, as witness Asia Minor and the mosques into which Christian churches have been turned.

These causes will produce like effects wherever they become dominant. Any church and any individual Christian who trusts in outward connection with Christ, and works iniquity, will sooner or later fall into the rear, and if repentance and faith do not lead it or him through the strait gate, will be among those lastwho are so far behind that they are shut out altogether. Let us be not high-minded, but fear.