

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International
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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Luke 13:22-30

Year C - Proper 16, Text: Luke 13:22-30
Year C - Proper 16, Text: (Luke 13:10-17)

Editor's Note: Dr. Wendt did not write a commentary for this text. To fill this gap, this commentary has been written by John B. King, Jr.

In this passage Jesus is passing through various towns on His final journey to Jerusalem and teaching the people as He goes. In one of these towns, someone asks Him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Jesus answers by saying:

"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 are 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! (Luke 13:24-27)'"

Note that in this lengthy response, Jesus does not answer the original question. The question is whether those who are saved will be few in number. Thus, the question concerns ends or results, the envisioned scope of salvation. However, Jesus responds by discussing the *means* of salvation rather than its *ends*: "Strive to enter through the narrow door."

But there is also a second way in which Jesus turns the original question. The question is about *those who are saved* and inquires whether they will be few in number. Jesus answers by discussing *those who are not saved* and says that they will be many, since they did not enter through the narrow door.

Thus, Jesus refuses to answer the original question on two counts. First, while the question concerns the ends of salvation, Jesus discusses its means. Second, although the question asks about those who are saved, Jesus responds by discussing those who are unsaved. Consequently, Jesus never says that the saved will be few in number.

Indeed, from His later discussion it seems that many will be saved, even though some will miss out.

"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. (Luke 13: 28-30)."

So, if Jesus is not answering the original question, what is He doing? Jesus is challenging initial question together with the assumptions upon which it is based. And He is doing so by implicitly substituting and then answering a different question. It is as if Jesus had said, "You ask about how many will be saved, but the more important question is how people are saved in the first place."

Remember, Jesus is passing through towns and teaching them as He goes to Jerusalem to die. He is likely teaching them about the Kingdom, and they wonder if those who enter the Kingdom will be few. However, like Peter they probably envision a political Kingdom based upon Abrahamic descent with a few elite Jews at the top who achieve their status through Pharisaic law-keeping. Thus, the door to their Kingdom is Jewish identity, and salvation is further restricted to an elite subset of law-keepers. In other words, the door is narrow, and salvation is even narrower.

For Jesus, however, the door to the Kingdom is His substitutionary death and resurrection. This means that Jesus Himself is the door. Moreover, since salvation is open to all who trust in Him regardless of their nationality, salvation is not *a priori* restricted to a subset of people. For Jesus, therefore, the door is narrow, but salvation is broad in its scope.

However, due to this confusion about the door to the Kingdom, there will be a great reversal. Those expect-

ing a Jewish Kingdom based on Abrahamic descent and Pharisaic law-keeping will strive to enter through the wrong door and will therefore fail to enter the Kingdom. Thus, those who were previously first will be last. On the other hand, those who trust in Jesus' death and resurrection will enter through the narrow door and gain access to the Kingdom. And since this will occur for Gentiles as well as Jews, those who were formerly last will now be first.

So, this passage teaches us that the door to the Kingdom is narrow but that the scope of the Kingdom is broad. It therefore encourages us to preach a "narrow" gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But it encourages us to do so in the hope that this "narrow" message will bear much fruit with the result that many people will enter God's Kingdom from all the nations of the earth.