

August 2014

Dear neighbours,

The Sermon on the Mount defines the Saviour's teaching at the outset of His ministry, so that His disciples would know what was expected of them and others would know what would be expected if they also were to become His disciples. It takes up chapters 5-7 of the Gospel according to Matthew.

Concerning becoming a disciple, a believer, a follower of Him, concerning entering on that path, this is what He said (Matthew 7.13-14). "Enter ye in at the strait (narrow) gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

You can imagine that when the crowds dispersed these words, among others, would be passed on in all the little villages and towns throughout Galilee as far as Jerusalem, for the people had come from that distance (Matthew 4.25). Maybe as much as a year or two later when Jesus was en route to Jerusalem someone asked Him the question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" (Luke 13.23). Perhaps he'd heard from others of those earlier words and wanted to check for himself that they'd got it right.

The Lord Jesus Christ replied, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13.24). In one way His answer is much the same, except that He adds the word, "Strive." Work at it. Consider nothing done until this is done. He doesn't actually say there are few – though He does say that many won't make it because they've left it too late. "When once the master of the house is risen up (that is, our heavenly Father) and shut to the door, and ye begin to stand outside, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us..." (Luke 13.25). Coma, accident, sudden death – for whatever reason they'd left it too late. The Saviour does not say categorically, on this occasion, that there are few who will be saved. His answer simply means, "Never mind how many there are who are saved, many or few. Just be sure that you're one of them."

Way back in Old Testament days at the giving of the ten commandments, the Lord's own comment on the second commandment (concerning not serving idols) was, "thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments" (Deuteronomy 5.9-10).

Thousands of them that loved Him were saved in those days. When things were so bad in the days of Elijah, he thought he was the only believer left. But the Lord said there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. 3000 were saved ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, on the day of Pentecost. Thousands have been saved since across the world. Each loved by our heavenly Father as if they were the only ones. It is believed that there may currently be millions of true Christians in China. So why not you? Are you going to miss out? Is your precious eternal soul going to perish, that is still to exist (souls never cease) but be no longer fit for purpose, for the purpose of serving God?

These thousands do not constitute a majority of those who have ever lived. But when every believer is gathered in from every period of history, and from every place in the whole wide world it will be the single largest kingdom there ever has been. That kingdom will remain for eternity. So, simply because at this time it is probably not a majority faith in the UK, would it be wise of you to neglect so great salvation? In the total scheme of things why be left out? One day, He says, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (anger) when you see many inside the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out (Luke 13.28). "Thrown out" is what Jesus actually said. It could be translated "expelled." Not allowed near at any price. We thought we were rejecting Christ but in reality He rejects us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is known as the Saviour. The angel told Joseph, "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." The name Jesus means "Saviour," and it was always understood that the saving of people, the rescuing of them, was to be from sin and the dominion of the evil one.

So the Lord Jesus Christ was quite at home with the term "saved." His message was a message of salvation. Many of you will recall the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). The Saviour said to him, "this day is salvation come to this house." He was more than comfortable with the terms "saved", "Saviour" and "salvation." It was His life's work to save, and to be the "captain of salvation" (Hebrews 2.10) for those who trust Him. Every member of His kingdom will share this characteristic that they entered by being saved. Put another way, the Lord said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3.3). Two verses later He adds that he cannot enter the kingdom of God without such a spiritual change.

What Jesus is saying is all about entering His kingdom. "Enter ye in at the strait gate." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Overcome all obstacles of prejudice, ridicule, to do so. But how do we do it?

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2.21; Romans 10.13). "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10.9). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16.31). Those who preach the gospel are called "ministers by whom ye believed even as the Lord gave to every man" (1 Corinthians 3.5).

Entering into that belief means understanding why Jesus came. He came because "all have sinned" (Romans 8.23). It means acknowledging that we ourselves are sinners and that above all we have sinned against God (Luke 15.18). That God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7.11). However, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3.16). We enter by humbling ourselves before Him, confessing our lost condition and believing that on the cross He stood in my place, to bear the punishment due to me for my sin. His Holy Spirit then makes us understand deep in our hearts that forgiveness has been granted; that you are a child of God; and notwithstanding any remaining failings nothing shall ever separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8.39). It is the Lord Himself who so disposes the mind to make us want to believe and be saved above all else.

The Saviour prayed that "they may behold my glory" (John 17.24). He also said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14.3). Of all believers He said, "they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10.28-29).

Sins forgiven. Safe and secure for all eternity through the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't this the best faith in the world? Won't you strive to enter?