

The Narrow Way

Matt. 7:13,14

One thing we know, there is no magic formula that is the key to eternal life. Salvation is simple, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) Salvation is deep rather than shallow, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:9,10) There is such a thing as dead faith, as James calls it, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:19,20) Now we know that we are saved by faith rather than works, "For by grace you have been saved by faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast." So it is not a word formula that we repeat that saves us but genuine faith in God, heart faith rather than just lip faith. There is no act of devotion that will save us for we cannot earn that which is a gift but living faith will be made evident by a transformation of character that will be evidenced by substantive choices we make that reflect Christ's presence in our lives. All of these truths are evident in the language of salvation. Paying close attention to these metaphors of salvation will clarify the issue but many seem to satisfied with an easier way.

For example, in John 1:10-13, speaking of Christ, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came into his own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name..." When Jesus came into this world, a world He had made, He was not recognized as who He was. He specifically came to His own people, the Jews but they rejected Him (did not receive Him). Some though, a small minority, did receive Him. These were His disciples. Receiving Him meant acknowledging who He was, believing that He was their Savior, Christ the Lord. These who received Him left everything to follow Him. Their commitment was total and life-long. This is what

it means to receive Christ and those who do receive Christ have become the children of God.

In John 3:16, the most recognized verse in the Bible we have the promise that whoever believes in His shall not perish but have eternal life. It is significant though that Jesus linked this promise to the Old Testament experience of Israel when they were in the wilderness and when the poisonous snakes came among the people in judgment of their sin of complaining against God. They then cried out to God for

relief from the snakes and God told Moses to make a snake out of bronze and to raise it on a stake above the camp. Everyone who looked at the bronze snake would be healed and they were. Looking at the snake was an admission that the people had sinned and that the snake bite was a consequence of that sin. The snake served as a symbol of God's healing, mercy, grace and forgiveness. So this is what Jesus was saying when He said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The story behind Acts 16:31 continues to add context to the concept of what it is to believe in Christ. Paul and Silas had been thrown in jail for the conversion of a slave girl that resulted in freeing her from a divining spirit. In the jail, they were preaching and singing praises to God when an earthquake freed all of the prisoners from their chains. The jailer, in a state of panic, was about to fall on his sword when Paul called out to him, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." This was a remarkable fact, indicating that the prisoners were so intrigued by Paul and Silas' witness and worship that they did not want to leave - even when they could have. (In Christ they were already free) There is more freedom for a disciple of the Lord Jesus in prison than there is for those who are lost outside of prison. The jailer cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." He took Paul and bandaged his wounds and he and all of his family were baptized immediately. But the jailer and his family were the second group

to discover the freedom of salvation in Christ that night, the first group was that of the prisoners in the jail.

Each of these stories is consistent with Jesus' teaching of the narrow gate and the narrow way found by the few rather than the many. Only a small minority received Jesus as Savior and Lord and gave their lives to Him, becoming His disciples. Only a few looked to the cross for healing and salvation compared to the multitudes who rejected and crucified the Lord. Then, in the city of Philippi, when the entire city favored the jailing of Paul, in the dungeon, his spirit remained free, bringing liberty to the other prisoners and to the jailer and his family though no one's circumstances changed.

But we should also see that when you enter through the narrow gate your journey proceeds down the narrow way. The multitudes will not accept the teachings of Jesus and live by them rather than by their own reason and desires. Religious expression is corrupted by selfish ambition and pride. The truth of the law is distorted by a system of self-justification. Spiritual identity is expressed by a nationalistic spirit and ethnic

superiority rather than by attitudes of humility and submission to God. An angry resistance to oppression keeps the people down and blocks them from the opportunity of spiritual advantage. Worries over financial security become an obsession with money and the treasures that money buys, replacing trust in God and a focus on the eternal. Whatever standards or values that the majority embraces becomes the basis for the condemnation of any who do not conform. Taking care of number one is the mantra to the exclusion of charity or sacrifice made on behalf of the needy.

The broad way has a very large population but it is hard to find those who travel down the narrow path. Jesus walked that path and He knows the commitment required of those who seek to follow. He calls us to enter at the narrow gate and to proceed down the narrow path. There are not many that take this course but it is the only path where Jesus can be found.