

“Who is IN and who is OUT?”

“Lord, will those who are saved be few?” an unidentified “someone” asks Jesus. It’s really a question of who is IN, and who is OUT? Or, more precisely, am I IN, or OUT? Will I sit with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the blest at the feast in His heavenly kingdom?

A quick side note to begin. The typical mindset is that everyone is IN – everyone is going to heaven – unless they are really horrible and deserve to be cast out. But that’s not what the Scriptures teach. God’s Word is clear that all have sinned – that no one is righteous, not even one – that no one deserves to go to heaven.

That’s where we need to begin. All are OUT – out of heaven – because of our sin, our rebellion, our rejection of God. You said it yourself! “Let us consider our unworthiness” – let us confess “that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition.”

So, where does that leave us? On the OUTside looking IN. [P] Dearly beloved, “Let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

To our fellow sinners in our text for today (on the OUTside looking IN) – Jesus speaks of the end of times when all will be seen, and these questions answered.

Do you ever think of that, what it will be like in the end? Are you frustrated by all the division within Christianity – by arguments with fellow Christians, maybe even family members, about what is true? I do. And I find comfort that in the end – the truth will come out. The false teachings will be revealed even my own.

As confessional Lutherans we are devoted to the apostolic teaching – to the Lord’s truth which He reveals to mankind in His Holy Scriptures. Will those who hold to false teachings – whose faith is at least partially in something which is wrong, or empty – will that keep them out of heaven?

With our eyes we cannot determine who is a believer, and who is not – but in the end – those who are in Christ by faith, will be made known for all to see.

For now, we live in a world full of false gods, false wisdom and philosophies. Many turn to science for truth – but what we know of as “science” is not certain and sure. Man says, “this is how it works” – but in the end – God says, “No, this is how it works.”

Some of our scientific facts may indeed be true, but not all of it. Evolutionary theory will be exposed for the lie that it is. And climate change – is it the result of what man is doing – or, is it the cycle of what happens in a fallen Creation?

Who knows, maybe when Christ comes again on the Last Day we will finally know what the appendix is for? Man has scratched his head for centuries trying to figure out what this tiny piece of flesh is all about, to no avail. Maybe we will finally know – OR, maybe it IS nothing – something God has given to show us that our pursuit of truth and knowledge is limited – that we are not the Creator, but creation.

Back to the question at hand. “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” As we listen to Jesus’ answer this morning, we must also consider it in the context of all that Jesus was doing and teaching.

Ever since coming down from the Mountain of Transfiguration – Jesus has set His face towards Jerusalem. He must go there! Nothing will deter Him. The exodus of which He speaks to Moses and Elijah about on the mountain is His crucifixion and resurrection. As St. Luke records just a few verses after our text, Jesus says, “Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.” So, it is to Jerusalem that Jesus must go.

As He goes, He gives a Word to live by – for all the people from the towns and villages, and for us today – in answer to our nagging question. “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” But then He says, “For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” --- which only makes one question all the more – am I IN, or OUT?

On that day, some will say – “Lord, open to us” the door” – only to hear Him say, “I do not know where you come from.” Sure you do, comes the reply – “we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.”

Does that make you nervous – you who have eaten the Lord’s Supper in His presence, and have been catechized by Him? Especially when you consider that everyone is born OUTside the kingdom of God – that, as sinners, none of us is righteous – that all of us are unworthy to enter in.

So are you IN? What does Jesus say? “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” But what is this narrow door? It is nothing other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified – the very reason He resolutely sets His face towards Jerusalem – to the cross, to His suffering and death – the only hope for sinners.

With His very own blood, He pays the debt you owe to God because of your sin. All who look – not to themselves, but to the blood of Jesus Christ – are IN. The perfect righteousness of God’s own Son clothes you – so that you may enter into the presence of God – as one who is reconciled and restored to your heavenly Father.

The narrow door to the kingdom of God is Jesus Christ and His gracious forgiveness. To all who live by faith in Him, they enter into the kingdom with “Abraham and Isaac and Jacob” and all believers – to sit at the heavenly banquet feast – to eat and drink and live with God and all His children, for all eternity.

Already now you sit at this feast, even though your eyes cannot fully comprehend what is going on. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you come to the feast He has spread for you in His Supper – to receive the very body and blood of Jesus, given and shed in death upon a cross in Jerusalem – and raised to life again on the third day, never to die again.

It’s what we hear in the Proper Preface as we prepare to receive the Lord’s Supper. We give thanks to the Father who has sent His Son – “who on this day overcame death and the grave and by His glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life.” Jesus, crucified, died and risen – the narrow door – for you, and for all believers.

Therefore, with angels, archangels and all the company of heaven – let us laud and magnify the Lord – rejoicing that we are IN His kingdom – through Jesus Christ, the narrow door. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.