

Luke 13:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?
And he said unto them,

Analysis

Someone asks: 'Lord, are there few that be saved?' Jesus responds: 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able' (Κύριε, εἰ ὀλίγοι οἱ σωζόμενοι; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, Ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς στενῆς θύρας· ὅτι πολλοί, λέγω ὑμῖν, ζητήσουσιν εἰσελθεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἰσχύσουσιν). Jesus redirects from speculation to personal urgency. The verb 'agōnizomai' (ἀγωνίζεσθε, strive) means agonize, fight, compete intensely—salvation requires wholehearted commitment. The 'narrow door' (στενῆς θύρας) admits only those willing to abandon self-righteousness and trust Christ alone.

Historical Context

The question about few being saved reflects Jewish debate over Gentile inclusion and salvation criteria. Some rabbis taught that all Israel would be saved; others emphasized strict observance requirements. Jesus' answer warns against presuming salvation through ethnic heritage ('we have eaten and drunk in thy presence,' v.26) or religious association. His warning that 'many will seek to enter and shall not be able' challenges comfortable assumptions about automatic salvation. The narrow gate/broad way contrast (Matthew 7:13-14) became central to Christian understanding of salvation's exclusivity through Christ.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does the call to strive and agonize teach about the seriousness of pursuing salvation?
2. How does Jesus' answer challenge both presumptuous assurance and anxious uncertainty about salvation?

Interlinear Text

εἶπεν δὲ τις αὐτοὺς Κύριε εἰ ὀλίγοι οἱ
he said And one him Lord are there few G3641 G3588
G2036 G1161 G5100 G846 G2962 G1487

σωζόμενοι ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς
that be saved G3588 **And he said unto him**
G4982 G1161 G2036 G4314 G846

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 7:14 (Parallel theme): Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 22:14 (Parallel theme): For many are called, but few are chosen.

Matthew 20:16 (Parallel theme): So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.