

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 ἴσχύσουσιν). 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

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

εἰπεν	δὲ	τις	αὐτούς	Κύριε	εἰ	όλιγοι	οἱ
he said	And	one	him	Lord	are there few	G3641	G3588
G2036	G1161	G5100	G846	G2962	G1487		
σωζόμενοι	ό	δὲ	εἰπεν	πρὸς	αὐτούς		
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.