

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister  
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The Sermon: ENTER YE IN AT THE STRAIT GATE

Scripture: Matthew 7:13,14

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate,  
and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and  
many there be who go in thereat. Because strait is the  
gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and  
few there be that find it.

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Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say  
unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

It is probable that there are very few people who have been driving a car for any length of time who have not scraped off a little fender paint at some time or other on the sides of a garage door that was too narrow. It is especially difficult to get a wide modernly styled automobile through a garage door styled for the venerable but relatively narrow model T. If you have ever scraped your car fender on a garage door, you should be in a position to know what Jesus meant when he talked about going through the strait gate.

Since there are two words that sound alike, but with different meanings, perhaps we should remind our listeners that this "strait" is not spelled "straight." It has nothing to do with the number of crooks and turns. The spelling is "strait." The word comes to us from Middle English through the French, but originates in the Latin verb "stringere," which means to press together, to draw tight. The past participle of this Latin verb is "strictus," which gives us such English words as "strict," "restrict," and "constrict." The word "strait" is still used to mean a narrow passage of water connecting two larger bodies of water. When Paul could not make up his mind which of two things to do, he wrote to the Philippians, "I am in a strait betwixt two." We speak of being in "straitened" financial circumstances, meaning that we are pinched for money. It is this kind of "strait" which Jesus meant when he said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate."

Whatever we do, and in whatever field of endeavor we seek to do it, we must follow this principle of entering in at

the strait gate. Every action, every achievement, demands that we renounce and forego some other action or achievement. When you leave your home to go to church, or to the shopping center, or to a movie, you must obey certain restrictions as to the route you travel. If you wander about aimlessly, you may never arrive at the place where you wanted to go. If you set off down the highway to drive to a neighboring town, you don't drive across the farmer's fields or through any likely looking bit of woods. You eliminate all wanderings; you restrict yourself to the all-too-narrow confines of the roadway, or you don't arrive at your destination.

Notice too, that a road which was a thousand miles wide would be no highway at all. It is the relative narrowness of a highway that makes it a highway. If the highway were a thousand miles wide, you could still keep on the road and miss your destination by nine hundred ninety-nine miles. Even while you are on the highway you are not free. Law and custom demand that you drive on the right side of the road, that you place certain limitations on your speed, that you observe certain rules when passing. To drive with reckless abandon all over the road, with no regard for restrictive rules, is practically to guarantee that you will never arrive at your destination.

Whether you want to bake a cake, or build a skyscraper or bridge, or compound a prescription, or raise a crop of wheat, or play the piano, or write a poem, there are certain restrictions on your freedom which you must recognize and obey if you want to achieve the desired result. You don't bake a cake by tossing together mis-

cellaneous unrelated ingredients in any proportion you please in order to express your freedom. You don't raise wheat by planting corn or any other seed you happen to have on hand. You don't learn to play the piano by spending all your spare time at golf. You don't compound a prescription by guessing at amounts because you can't be bothered with the troublesome restrictions on your freedom which demand that you weigh and measure them.

If men would enter the kingdom of God, or if they would have that kingdom on earth, they must enter in at the strait gate. We recognize this principle in almost every other field of endeavor, but many of us think that to recognize it in entering or achieving the kingdom is too much trouble. The price we must pay is too high. We want the kingdom; we want eternal life which it brings, but we want it on our own terms. We do not want to have our freedom curtailed or restricted by God's rules. We want to have and to enjoy what we like, not what God likes. We want to spend our time and effort and money on the things that will interest, thrill, and entertain us, and then have the kingdom too. We want to use our own easy convenient methods, instead of the slow, tedious, laborious, methodical processes which God asks us to use.

Jesus said, "Have faith in God." He said, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." He said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Those are some of the restrictions at the strait gate. He who would enter the kingdom must have faith; he must repent of his sins, forsake them, do them no more. He must be baptized in water in such a manner that he is born of the water. He must likewise be born of the Spirit. In New Testament times this experience came through the laying on of hands of the apostles.

Jesus also said that many should find the wide gate and the broad way which leads to destruction, and few should find the strait gate which leads to eternal life at its fullness. Entering the strait gate is too much trouble; it is inconvenient; it is unpopular; it requires far too much discipline and preparation and renunciation which we are not willing to undergo. Many false teachers have tried to make it easy to enter the kingdom by setting up broad gates of their own devising, and inviting all who didn't want to be old fashioned or narrow minded to confess the name of Christ, and come on in with all their old sins and habits and vices and attitudes unrepented of, and unchanged.

We cannot keep everything that the old sinful man has clung to and lusted after, and have the kingdom too. The way of the kingdom is the way of renunciation, of self-denial, of humble submission to the will of God. It is the way of repentance, not just one act of repentance at a given moment, but a progressive and growing repentance which may well continue over a lifetime as growing awareness and discernment disclose more imperfections of which we need to repent. The way of the kingdom is the way of self-discipline. The gate through which we enter the kingdom is strait. To get through it we have to strip off all the non-essentials, all pride, all self-will, all rebellion. We have to forego all interests, all activities, all methods which cannot be related to and made to work for the kingdom. Few indeed are those willing to enter the kingdom through this strait gate.

Perhaps someone is saying that this makes the Christian life decidedly lacking in joy, or happiness, or in fulfillment. The renunciation required of those who would enter the strait gate is not for the purpose of mutilation or repression, but for the sake of fulfillment. The athlete must repress many of his appetites and restrict his leisure, his play, his recreation, his night life, if he would keep the training rules. But if he keeps the training rules, he wins the game. That is his fulfillment and his reward. He can't break training and win games. He can't have both his freedom and his reward. He gives up one that he might achieve the other. So it is with those who by stern renunciation give up all to enter the strait gate. The result, the goal to be achieved, is eternal life, life more abundant -- not in some distant heaven, but here and now. For he who orders his life according to the laws of God and of God's kingdom is free to go anywhere and do anything he pleases in that kingdom; while he who will not abide by the laws of the kingdom must be content to dwell in some other kingdom -- one whose laws he has been willing to obey.

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many ... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." In Luke's account of this saying there is a note of haste. There will come a time when the door will be shut, when the wedding feast begins within the household of God. It will then be too late for those who have familiarly called Jesus Lord, but refused to do the things which he commanded, to make the renunciation that will permit them to pass through the strait gate into his kingdom.

