

LET ME IN!  
Revelation 21:10, 22-27  
Matthew 7:13-23

APRIL 27, 1986

Early on a Monday afternoon in December, 1982, a crowd began to gather at the Riverfront Coliseum in Cincinnati. By the time the police arrived at 3:00, hundreds of fans had gathered, though the doors were not expected to open until 7:00. Many had come on chartered buses from other cities. The day the tickets had gone on sale, they were sold out in less than two hours. The event for which this crowd gathered was a concert by a rock group called The Who.

By early evening, a crowd of more than 8,000 was pressing against the doors. The head of the police crowd-control group went inside at 7:00 to find someone to open the doors. One of the concert promoters told him the doors could not be opened yet. The crowd outside, eager to get in, became restless and at 7:20, someone broke the glass of one of the doors and opened it. The mob surged forward. The police heard that some people had fallen, but the crowd was so dense they could not penetrate it. When they were finally able to force their way through, they found that eleven people had died of suffocation and eight were severely injured. "Let me in!" they cried, but eleven people would never see another concert.

Most of us are constantly trying to get into something--a rock concert, a restaurant, a movie. It's that time in the colleges and universities when freshmen are trying to get into fraternities and sororities. "Let me in!" they cry, and to some it is a question of their self-worth. It's that time of year when high school seniors are trying to get into Stanford or Yale or Foothill! "Let me in!" they plead.

There is an inner drive in all of us to "get in" and there is pain when we fail. I remember when I went to the huge University of Minnesota from my small rural high school, and found the adjustment exceedingly difficult. I just didn't fit in with the guys in the dormitory, and we didn't have co-ed dormitories in that day! I found one friend, but I never clicked with my roommate, or the gang on the floor. I felt lonely and isolated. The real disappointment came when I tried out for the University of Minnesota Band. Oh, how I wanted to play in the band! The band in my high school was so small it didn't even march, so it was my heart's desire to march in the half-time football shows with the U of M Band. With trembling hand, sweaty palms, and palpitating heart, I took my trombone to the director's office to try out. I played a song. Then, he put a Sousa march in front of me and said, "Play that." Well, I had barely heard of Sousa, much less ever played anything that difficult. I didn't make the band. I didn't get in.

It hurts when you don't get in. I remember wanting to get into a relationship with a particular girl but she wanted no part of me. I remember when I wanted to be best friends but he didn't want to get into such a relationship. It hurts when you want to share someone's life and you find it difficult to "get in." People put up barriers. Some just don't want to get involved, and you feel rejected. It hurts to be rejected, but life goes on.

Time helps to heal. In Minnesota we put Peterson's Ointment on the hurts, cuts, bruises and sores. In Australia we discovered Lucas' Pawpaw (Papaya) Ointment, but those ointments don't work on the hurt caused by rejection. We need spiritual ointments like prayer, the scriptures and Christian fellowship. Let the Holy Spirit soothe and heal the hurt.

The cry--LET ME IN--is a manifestation of a basic psychological need of all of us, the need to belong. We find our identity, we discover who we are, we express who we are, by where we belong. You are identified by the friends you keep. You are known by the clubs and organizations to which you belong.

Therefore, it is important for you to decide, and to be very clear, especially to yourself, whether what you want to get into is really worthy of you. Sometimes people join too hastily. They follow the crowd, try to join the popular gang at school, or try to get into what they imagine is THE PRESTIGIOUS university; or try to get into the country club where "just everyone who counts" belongs! But, watch out. Be really clear. Sometimes the gang you want to join is destructive, and you might find yourself on drugs, or alcohol. Sometimes the girl you so desperately want to enter into relationship with may turn out to be a lousy wife. Sometimes you will be hurt, frustrated, and disappointed because what you wanted to join is not worthy of you.

That which is ultimately worthy of you, worthy of your commitment, worthy of your life, is Jesus Christ, his church and his kingdom. The search for something to which to belong so that you might find your identity is satisfied only by Jesus Christ. Only the God who made you can satisfy your deep desires. It is God for whom you yearn. It is God with whom you are trying to find union, identity and meaning. Direct your cry--LET ME IN!--to God!

And the irony is that you will find that God has already let you in. Salvation is the act of being accepted by God. God has reached out and bridged the gap between you and God. Christ has overcome all the obstacles that separate you from God. The relationship with God which you so desperately crave is available and it is free, free grace. Therefore, it is easy to join a United Methodist Church. The entrance requirement is only one: that you desire to be saved, that you seek to get into the kingdom of God. You don't have to prove your righteousness, you don't have to prove the validity of your spiritual experience, you don't have to be a spiritual graduate to be a member of the United Methodist Church.

Seekers are welcome! Salvation is not the end of the journey, but the beginning. Salvation is the act of beginning the journey to the kingdom of God. Salvation is not the end of the road, but the beginning. God lifts you out of the ditch and places you on the road that leads to heaven. It is easy to get in. Unlike friendship, or courtship, or Stanford, it is easy to get into salvation. It is easy to get on the road that leads to the kingdom of God.

But, getting in is no guarantee you will stay in! Getting into a college is no guarantee you will stay in! It takes study, hard work, and determination to remain a university student and to graduate, to reach the end of the journey. Getting into a friendship is no guarantee you will stay in; no guarantee that the friendship will last. For a friendship to become a



beautiful, enduring relationship, consideration, attention, and communication are required. Getting into a marriage is no guarantee it will last. You dare not take your marriage for granted. It takes effort, commitment and romance to stay in a marriage.

Likewise, getting into a relationship with God is no guarantee you will stay in, or reach the goal of the kingdom of God! Jesus was quite emphatic throughout the gospels, particularly in the passages read this morning. "Narrow is the gate. The way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." "Many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'" Revelation 21:27 states that only those will get in "who are written in the Lamb's book of life." Jesus said that those who make it into the kingdom of God and who stay in the kingdom of God are those "who do the will of my Father who is in heaven." It takes loyalty, commitment, obedience, and discipline.

Methodist theology explains this process. John Wesley, our founder, described salvation as the entry into the kingdom, and perfection, or sanctification, as the end of the journey. Wesley urged his followers to "go on to perfection", to seek the complete will of God, to become totally loving toward God and neighbor. To reach perfection, the end of the journey, zeal and determination are required, equal to the energy expended in the cry--LET ME IN!. Cry not only, "Let me in!", but "LET ME STAY!", and "LET ME REACH THE KINGDOM." Getting in the kingdom has been accomplished by Christ, but staying in is largely your decision, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our Methodist ancestors spoke of "backsliding." Sliding back is a constant temptation. To stay in, without backsliding, and to reach perfection requires the nurturing of good habits, like those stated in the membership vows: prayer, regular attendance, giving and serving. Then, in God's own time (as the choir sang this morning), God works in you that work of grace called sanctification, or perfection, which makes you fit for the kingdom of God.

Some of you here this morning have not yet identified the inner cry--LET ME IN!--as a cry for God, a longing to be filled with the Holy Spirit, a yearning for perfection. Realize and admit your need for Christ. Accept God's gift of salvation. You can find God for God has already found you. Examine your life and count the many times God has protected you, held you, coached you, loved you--all evidences of your salvation. Look at the cross. Christ died there for you. He did all that needs to be done. Accept the gift of your salvation and get on with the journey.

Some of you here this morning have not claimed your salvation. You are still behaving as if you are an orphan, as if God has not claimed you. Some of you here this morning cannot yet say, "I am a Christian." To be a Christian means to claim your salvation which is a free gift of God.

Some of you here this morning know that you are Christians, know that you are in relationship with God, know that you are on the road, but you also know that you aren't going anywhere. You are stuck in a rut. You are missing the adventure, and you may not make it. Get moving! Exert a little will and effort. Set some goals, do the will of God, clean up your life, put aside the

concerns of this world, and get excited about the kingdom of God, for the journey to the kingdom of God is an exciting adventure.

Your cry can change from a desperate, pleading "LET ME IN!" to "HALLELUJAH! I'M NOT ONLY IN, BUT I'M ON MY WAY TO THE KINGDOM." As we heard in Bach's cantata this morning, "Trusting in His promise sure, in death I sleep calm and secure. All glory, praise, and majesty to Father, Son and Spirit be, the holy blessed Trinity, whose power to us gives victory."

#### PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

By Glenn S. Fuller

Dear Parent God,

From Whom every good gift cometh, through Whom every evil deed can be redeemed, and in Whom is our faith, our hope and our love sustained in every circumstance.

Thank You for the gift of another week, for healings received, for good things achieved, for love of family, friends and faith given, and for trials and testing shared by Thee through Thy Son Jesus Christ.

Offer special comfort, blessing and healing to Louella Austen, Isabelle Anderson, Miriam Bubb, Isabelle Cox, John Drummond, Clarence Foiles, Beth Kennedy, Alan Walker, Marion Westerland, Robert Youngberg. Bring comfort, pardon and renewal of life to any of our number in trouble with justice; bring comfort, guidance and a new quality of trust to those facing separation and divorce; bring confidence, a true sense of priorities, and Divine strength to those under continuous stress at home or at work.

As we share tonight the excitement and adventure of an astronaut, stretch our imaginations to understand more of Your wondrous world; grant us a new vision for creativity, justice, and shalom for this globe; grant to us new courage to face up to new possibilities for all segments of our society; and inspire us with the adventure of following Christ with all of our heart and serving His needy world with all of our resources, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray together saying,

"Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed by thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On Earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,  
And the glory,  
Forever and ever." Amen

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