

The Time of God's Salvation

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[0 : 00] Now, if you have a church Bible, we're going to be in Luke chapter 13, from verse 22 to 35.

That's on page 1047. We also find the words up there on the screen. And we'll pay attention to this question that Jesus has asked, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?

So, verse 22 of Luke chapter 13, then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? He said to them, make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, Sir, open the door for us. But he will answer, I don't know you are where you come from. Then you will say, we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets. But he will reply, I don't know you are where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers. There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.

At that time, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you. He replied, go and tell that fox. I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day, for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

[2 : 07] Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you are not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Let's begin by observing this fact that restrictions and limits are a normal part of life.

Think about the world of sport. Think about football as an example. You can only celebrate a goal if the whole ball passes through the goalpost. Those are recommended limits. Without them, the whole game becomes a farce. Or think about parking. Some of us had to run that gauntlet this morning. We have in Edinburgh residence parking. We have restricted parking. And just a heads up from January, we are the first city in the UK to have a ban on pavement parking. So you're welcome. Beware.

Think about exams and graduations. Success comes. The paper comes only if you fall within the right limits, if you get the right grade. So we understand restrictions and limits are a normal part of life.

So when Jesus is asked, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? We can perhaps understand then why Jesus responds with this talk about the narrow door. To say to us, there are limits on entry to the kingdom of God and to salvation. Indeed, with this image, Jesus is reminding us he is the only way.

[4 : 13] He is the gate to salvation. He is the way back to life with God, the way to peace with God. Indeed, indeed, this explains his journey to Jerusalem. The way into the kingdom of God is through trusting in Jesus, the one who came to live a perfect life for us, and then to die on the cross as a sacrifice, taking the punishment that we deserve so that simply by trusting in him, we might be forgiven and invited into God's kingdom. But it's interesting to notice the limit that Jesus focuses on.

Because he's asked a question about numbers, about, are only a few people going to be saved? He turns it into a question of timing. For Jesus, his focus is on the narrow window of opportunity, of the need to respond as we hear the good news of salvation.

So again, thinking back in our news a month or so ago, those storms that especially hit the northeast of Scotland, you probably heard some of those interviews with residents who were caught out.

They didn't listen to the warnings. They didn't evacuate their premises. They didn't think it was going to be such a big deal. So their time to find shelter passed, and they find themselves in a very serious condition indeed. Well, what the Word of God reminds us is that more serious still is the risk of missing this window of opportunity to find salvation through Jesus. Because Jesus has been reminding us in past weeks of the reality of God's judgment that falls against sin, against moral wrongdoing, and the only way of escape is not for us to turn over a new leaf, but it's to turn to trust in Jesus, the only Savior. So Jesus in our section invites us to see that he has come on God's timetable for salvation, and we need to respond in time and with a positive response to it. So the first thing that we need to think about is the time of opportunity, verses 22 to 30. Perhaps to help us to think about this, let me share the time when I missed a wedding. Thankfully not one that I was involved in being the minister of. That would be infinitely worse. But I had an invitation, but lost track of when the service was happening. I got the time wrong, and I arrived to find the door's locked. Inside, maybe you've had this experience. Inside, you know there's celebration, but outside you're left for that sense of disappointment and regret. Look at the picture Jesus uses for the kingdom of God. Verse 29, people will come from east, west, north, south, and will take their places at the feast. What's the kingdom of God like? What's life with God like?

It's like joy. It's about relationship. It's the very best, and it's celebration. Here's another way of Jesus saying, life with God is truly life to the full. And so Jesus is going to give encouragement. [8 : 03] Enter this life when you can. Enter this kingdom when you can. Don't be left outside in the cold. We see it through the whole section. Verse 24, Jesus said, having been asked the question, are only a few people going to be saved? He makes it very personal. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door. That word is the word for striving. Indeed, our English word, agonize, it is drawn from this Greek word. It's an Olympic word. You can think about the marathon runner striving to reach the end of the race, or the weightlifter straining to lift that bar. And the emphasis here is a call to personal responsibility, to respond to Jesus and His work. Regardless of what's happening elsewhere, regardless of what others are doing or saying, whatever our culture thinks, we have a responsibility to act. Luke's gospel is full of great examples of people making every effort.

The disciples, they hear the call of Jesus, come follow me, and they leave everything because they understand Jesus is better. Or there's Zacchaeus, a guy who's made a mess of his life because he's built his life around money, and he feels empty. And he hears Jesus is coming to town, and he pushes through the crowd, and he climbs up the tree so that he can meet with Jesus, just so he can see Jesus, actually. But he spends the day feasting. There was blind Bartimaeus. As Jesus was on his journey, he hears that Jesus is coming by the place where he begs, and he won't stop shouting, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. Make every effort to receive and respond to Jesus. Why make the effort? Well, he gives us that positive incentive. There's the feast, there's the joy of life with God, but there's also the negative warning. For example, verse 27,

I don't know you, away from me. Verse 28, the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Some are in, but for others there is weeping that is lost because they're on the outside.

Jesus says, ask and seek and knock. Read God's Word, asking that he would show you Jesus. Pray and ask that the Spirit would show the reality of God to you today. Ask questions of Christians if you don't understand who Jesus is and what he came to do. And if you do understand Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior for sinners like us, commit to him today. Make every effort. He says, make every effort to enter through the narrow door. And he gives that short story in verses 24 to 26.

[11 : 15] They speak of a door that is open now. There's a door of opportunity. There's an entry into the feast now, but there'll come a point where the Lord of the feast will close the door, and to turn up when the door is shut is to arrive too late. We can't presume to have the luxury of time.

Maybe we think we can put off learning more about Jesus for a more convenient time, or we put off putting our faith in Jesus until we've got our education sorted, our career sorted, our lives sorted. We can't presume on the luxury of time. Jesus invites us to eternal life today. Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts, as Psalm 95 said to us.

Jesus calls us to make a personal response. Notice verse 26 and 27. This story is a really pointed story, making it really personal for the folks around Jesus. Then you will say, we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets, but he will reply, I don't know you. Away from me, all you

evildoers.

There are lots of people always around Jesus, crowding around him, but so many of them still said no to his salvation. They didn't know Jesus. They didn't have a relationship with him because there was no faith and trust. And that should stand as a reminder, as a warning to us that being around Jesus, that's not enough. Being around church is good, because this is a place of worship. This is a place where we can hear the Bible. We can learn about Jesus, but being around church is not enough.

[13 : 13] Reading the Bible is a good thing, but without faith in Jesus, it's not enough. Being sympathetic to Christianity and not being hostile, that's good, but it's not enough.

Some of you I know have been interested in Jordan Peterson, the academic who sort of came to prominence a number of years ago, and he'd be one of the kind of leading intellectuals who've seen this kind of change in their approach to the Christian faith. And much more, people like Jordan Peterson or Tom Holland, much more positive and sympathetic to the Bible and its place within Western civilization, much more positive and sympathetic to the church, but still no personal faith. Maybe we know stories of families and friends. We've seen them come around the church, and there's been that interest for a while, but without personal faith, we know it's not enough.

The Bible makes clear we must be in Christ. Our faith must be placed in Jesus as Lord and Savior. We must seek to live with faith and obedience. We need a personal response. This is a time of opportunity.

Jesus says, don't live with eternal regret. Verse 28 to 30 speaks about that. You know that classic dinner time, dinner party discussion, maybe you hear it on Radio 4, you know, if you could have a meal or spend an evening with any famous person, dead or alive, who would you choose to have dinner with? If we were able to ask a first century religious Jew, who would you like to spend time with? Who would you like to have a meal with? You can imagine them answering Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or one of the great prophets, but listen to what Jesus says.

[15 : 25] There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. He invites them to look forward. If you don't trust in Jesus, they will be in those heroes of faith. They'll be in the kingdom, but you, you'll be on the outside. Verse 29, people from all nations, east and west and north and south, they're going to take their place in the feast. But if you don't trust in me, Jesus says, there is no feast, there is no joy for you. Indeed, there are those who are last who'll be first, and the first who'll be last. He warns the people in his day about that great reversal, those surprising people who find themselves in the kingdom, surprising people who find themselves outside the kingdom, because the kingdom of God is about grace. It's not based on merit. It's not based on the family that we belong to. It's not based on our background. So, those things that people in

Jesus' day were trusting, sometimes the things that we trust, they do not save. We are saved by grace. We're invited in by God's kindness as a gift to receive by faith. So, Jesus is on his journey to the cross, and he says to the people in his day, and he says to us, this is a time of opportunity, and so it's important for us to grasp it. A narrow door. Maybe we need to think about one of the criticisms that can be leveled against Christianity. Sometimes maybe people say, well, isn't Christianity awfully narrow and exclusive? How do we answer that if someone has that objection? Well, in one sense, we say, well, yes, it is narrow, because we must say Jesus is the only way to God. He is the only Savior for sinners. He is the only God who became one of us to live the life we couldn't live.

He is the only Son of God who gladly, lovingly went to the cross to die in our place for our sins, to give us forgiveness and eternal life that we don't deserve. So, yes, he's the only way.

That's not narrow, is it? It's narrow. Yes, we must trust in Jesus, but it's also wide. The invitation to receive salvation is wide. Luke, who writes this gospel, writes the book of Acts, and the book of Acts, tells the story of the church going global. Just look around this room today, and we discover that anybody can be a follower of Jesus. Any background, any nation, any age and stage in life. Christianity is narrow because it focuses on Jesus as the only Savior, but it's wide because it focuses on grace. We can be in because of Jesus, the Son of God who's done everything for our salvation.

It's not just for a certain kind of people, people who achieve, people who have the right color of skin, people who have the right nationality or background. And because it's about Jesus and it's about grace, we can say today is a day of opportunity for all of us. If you're not a Christian here today, it's

a day of opportunity for you to be saved by Jesus, to enjoy life with God. Make sure to enter.
[19 : 00] So, maybe that leads to another question. Well, how do we enter? If the kingdom of God is this feast that we're invited into, how do we enter? Our second point takes us to the timing of God's salvation.

Some of you maybe saw a number of years ago now that the film *Flags of Our Fathers*, or maybe if you like history, you've read the book. The book and the film, they tell the brutal story of the 36-day battle for Iwo Jima. So, U.S. Marines, towards the end of World War II, they invaded this small Pacific island with the goal of capturing Japanese airfields and bases. So, in the spring of 1945. And so, as they landed on this beach, there was fierce fighting. There was tens of thousands of soldiers on each side killed. There was huge loss of life. One of the crucial factors in the battle leading those Marines to victory was the taking of Mount Suribachi. So, beyond the beach, there was this mountain, Mount Suribachi. And there was an iconic photo, and it's up there, the moment when six Marines planted the U.S. flag on top of the mountain. They had faced heavy shelling. They'd gone through tank divisions. They'd fought with Japanese soldiers, but they fought relentlessly. They reached the goal, and the result was greater security in the Pacific region till the end of World War II and final peace.

In verse 31, word comes to Jesus. Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.

Your enemy, Herod, he's hunting you. He would kill you. And Jesus' response is to make plain that those threats that those threats are idle threats. Herod cannot stop God's mission of salvation.

[21 : 08] Herod's threats have no impact on Jesus' rescue mission. Look at verse 32, and let's see what Jesus will do.

Go tell that, folks. I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day, I will reach my goal. There's Jesus' message. I'll keep doing kingdom work. I'll keep driving back evil. I'll keep establishing the kingdom, giving this window, this signpost into what the future kingdom will be like. I'm going to keep showing I'm greater. I'm going to keep winning victories over the forces of darkness. And then on the third day, I will reach my goal.

Isn't it significant on the third day? Third day, reaching the end of his goal. And he will reach the end of his goal on the third day. Jesus is going to Jerusalem. And in the end of that journey, there would be another mountain and another victory. At Mount Calvary, it would not be a flag planted in the earth but the cross of the Lord Jesus. And on the third day, after dying for our sin, Jesus would rise for our salvation. Victory established, peace secured, plan of salvation complete.

Look at verse 33. What must Jesus do? In any case, regardless of threat, regardless of enemy, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day, for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

When Jesus says must, that must there, speaks to us of God's plan, God's eternal plan of salvation. I must go to Jerusalem. I must go to Jerusalem. I must go to the cross. I must suffer and die, because that's the only way to establish peace between a holy God and unholy people.

[23 : 26] That lasting peace, that true peace that we all need, can only come through his act of sacrificial love.

Go back to the narrow door, or go back to the question, are only a few people going to be saved? Think about the emphasis from Jesus here. What is he saying to us? He's saying, God, the God who made us, is a God who is willing to save. And we know that because he sent his Son in love. God demonstrates his love in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus is willing in love to die, to demonstrate the greatest love. Greater love has no one than this, to give his life for my friends. Jesus will die to turn enemies into friends, by dying to forgive our sin, and to give us eternal life. So, when we think about is the way of salvation, is it narrow? We need to see again that wide open invitation of grace. We need to recognize that those arms of Jesus that would be outstretched on the cross are arms that would lovingly welcome us if we would receive him. And it speaks to us also, this little section speaks to us of the good news of salvation, that Jesus has done it. He has paid the price in full. Jesus has accomplished salvation.

He doesn't just make it possible and leave us to do the rest. It is a completed work, which means he will certainly, absolutely, definitely, without a shadow of a doubt, save everyone who comes to him in faith. Because Jesus, like those Marines at Iwo Jima, went into battle with a clear goal, and he would not be shifted from it. He would go to the cross to die under the judgment of God, so that we wouldn't have to face the judgment of God.

What do we need to do? We need to turn from our sin. We need to turn from unbelief. We need to trust in him for forgiveness, to find peace with God and eternal life. And it reminds us that our response is key.

[25 : 58] And it's the last thing we'll think about. We'll think about the time of decision, verse 34 and 35, because what Jesus describes next is so significant, because it reminds us that we have a responsibility.

But it also, at the same time, reveals his heart of love for us. Jesus is willing, Jesus longs that Jerusalem would respond to him as God's Son, as God's Savior. He has a sense of deep grief. He weeps over the city that rejects him. And the focus is on personal responses to Jesus.

Maybe we can identify with this. Maybe we can identify with the sorrow that a parent feels. You have a child who is in trouble. Maybe a child who's making bad decisions. Life is going in the wrong direction. And you, as a parent, you would do anything to help and to rescue the child that you love. But you have that experience of help being pushed away. There's a particular kind of grief there.

Think about the language that Jesus uses in verse 34. Personal language. Think about the shock of the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, using farmyard language. Such is his care.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Think about that. Jesus pictures himself like a mother hen.

[28 : 01] The Son of God says, I'd be like a mother hen to chicks. You know, when danger comes, when there's a predator in the farmyard, the hen will gather the chicks for safety. Jesus would gather the people of Jerusalem to enjoy God's salvation and security. Jesus would gather you and I to find security and safety from him today. But you're not willing, Jesus says, you were not willing.

We began with a question, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? Jesus says, some people will not be saved because they'll deliberately choose that. Deliberately have a hard heart towards Jesus. Deliberately say no to him as king. Jesus would offer life and we'd say, no, thank you. The solemn note of judgment comes, look, your house has left you desolate. Pictures, the city as a bunch of ruins. They saw that in the Old Testament because judgment would come in the end on unbelief. And then Jesus quotes from Psalm 118, which we read earlier, I tell you, you'll not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

We could fast forward to chapter 19. Chapter 19 is when Jesus finally approaches Jerusalem, the triumphal entry it's called. He rides into Jerusalem as the humble king riding on a donkey, and behind him there are crowds of followers from Galilee, and they're singing this song, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But in Jerusalem, there's another crowd that gathers, and there's a different cry that goes up. Crucify him. We have no king but Caesar. His blood be on our heads.

Some welcome the coming of the king, some reject. There's another coming of Jesus at which this psalm could be sung. When Jesus comes again at the end of history, the Bible tells us everyone will see him, even those who pierced him. We're told every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Everybody will recognize on that day who Jesus truly is. But there's a tragedy that for those who miss the window of opportunity in this life, those who say no to Jesus as Savior and Lord in this life, they will recognize him then as Lord all too late, bowing then only to receive judgment. I was reading words from J.C. Ryle, the 19th century bishop of Liverpool. One sentence stood out to me. He said this, hell itself is nothing but truth known too late.

See, on that day when Jesus returns as king and judge, when he returns to gather his people, to enter that joyful feast that will last forever, some will know too late. Jesus was the Savior I needed. Jesus was the one who would forgive sin and put things right between me and God.

Jesus really does give perfect love. Jesus really is the only way into this perfect world that would last forever. But I said no. Now all I know is Jesus the judge. How awful on that day to realize too late Jesus is the Savior we need today. Jesus is willing. Are we willing to receive him and to be saved?

[32 : 23] Someone asked Jesus, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? It's interesting. Jesus doesn't actually directly answer the question. He doesn't want us to speculate on numbers. But what his word says to each of us today, loud and clear, is that today is a day of opportunity and a day of invitation.

An invitation from Jesus himself to trust in him to enter the feast of his love, his goodness, and his joy. He invites us to recognize, to hear that God, through his son Jesus, has done everything

required for our salvation. All we need to do is to trust in him, to live for him, with a promise that no one will be lost to come to him in faith. We have heard Jesus say from his heart he is willing to save.

The Bible tells us God takes no delight in the death of the wicked. And he shows patience to us, giving us a chance today to repent and to believe. So the door is narrow, because Jesus is the only way to life with God. But the promises of the gospel, the gracious invitation, the call of Jesus, they go wide to each one of us. Will we hear? Will we believe? Will we enter? Let's pray briefly.

Lord, our God, we thank you that Jesus came to answer that question. There are only a few going to be saved in a different ways, reminding us that he had come to accomplish the work of salvation, to complete the plan that everything is done, that all has been made ready, but also to remind us of our responsibility to take the opportunity to be willing to receive Jesus, to acknowledge him as King and Savior today. Lord, pray for any, especially who are wrestling with the truth of who Jesus is and what he came to do, wrestling with his claims on their lives.

Help them to commit and to trust, to enjoy life with you. I pray for those whose lives and hearts are full of questions. I pray that by your Spirit you'd be answering those questions.

[35 : 05] Lord, that together we might know the joy of salvation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now we're going to sing the hymn, Grace. That reminds us how it is that we are saved, not by our efforts, but by God's grace to us in and through the Lord Jesus. So let's stand as we sing grace.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.