

Avoiding the reversal

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[0 : 00] We now turn to this morning's reading from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13, starting at verse 31. At that very hour, some Pharisees came and said to him, that's Jesus, get away from me, for Herod wants to kill you.

And he said to them, go and tell that fox, behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow and the third day I finish my horse.

Nevertheless, I must go my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it.

How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. Behold, your house is forsaken, and I tell you, you will not see me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropped sea.

[1 : 23] And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away and said to him, Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?

And they could not reply to these things. Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honour, saying to them, When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him.

As he who invited you both will come and say to you, give your place to this person. Then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place.

But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, Friend, move up higher.

Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

[2 : 50] He also said to the man who had invited him, When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Well, thanks so much for reading for us. Let me add my welcome to you. Lovely to have a good number with us this morning. Why don't I pray before we look at Luke 13 and 14 together.

Let's pray. Psalm 19. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this huge privilege we have of being able to hear your voice this morning.

[4 : 05] And we pray that you would indeed revive our souls, make us wise, rejoice our hearts and enlighten our eyes.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, if you were with us last week, you'll remember that we started looking at this section of Luke's Gospel.

The issue of the section is there in verse 23. Lord, will those who are saved be few? And the answer we saw, both yes and no.

Yes, verse 24, the door is narrow. The day will come when it will be shut. Jesus Christ is the only way into God's kingdom and therefore the urgent need to follow him.

But no, verse 29, people will come from north and south and east and west into his kingdom.

Perhaps that yes and no is best summarised in the reversal we saw in verse 30.

[5 : 07] Some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last. But I guess that all begs the question, doesn't it? Why is it that more people don't put their trust in Jesus?

Why is it that so many who are first don't follow him? Now, I take it that kind of question is an issue for all of us, whether we're simply looking in on the Christian faith or whether we are followers of Jesus Christ.

It can be unsettling to look around at what is supposedly still a Christian country and see how Jesus has largely been erased from the landscape, whether it's in the media or politics or some of the established church denominations which have turned their backs on the teaching of Jesus.

It raises questions such as, well, if so many who are first, if so many influential people reject Jesus, then should I even be investigating the claims of Jesus for myself, let alone actually following him? It's an issue too, isn't it, at an individual, at a personal level. Why don't more of the people I know follow Jesus? Perhaps the colleague who hears something of the Christian message, who does a Christianity Explore course, and although appreciative, actually they do nothing with what they hear.

[6 : 39] Or the religious person who at one level seems keen to investigate and to look at the Bible and yet put them in front of the real Jesus, and they'd rather keep their religion than following him.

Well, today's passage helps us to understand why that is. It's vital that we do so, otherwise, of course, we will quickly get discouraged. Either we'll conclude that no one will follow Jesus, or we'll conclude that God isn't powerful, or simply that we are hopeless at talking to others about the Lord Jesus.

Or perhaps we'll just conclude that actually God's kingdom is really not very significant at all, and therefore it's not worth investing our time and energy and resources in.

So that's the issue for today. Why aren't more people saved? And if you've printed off the outline, then you'll see that Jesus' answer is in two parts. Firstly, it's not because he lacks compassion.

It's not because Jesus lacks compassion. Secondly, it's because people lack humility. Firstly then, it's not because Jesus lacks compassion.

[7 : 52] Verse 31, At that very hour, some Pharisees came and said to him, Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you. Now, the Pharisees are the respectable religious establishment.

Herod is the ruling tetrarch of Galilee. He's the head of state under the Roman Empire. He's already had John the Baptist beheaded.

Are the Pharisees, therefore, are they being helpful, or are they simply trying to get Jesus out of the way? I guess probably the latter. After all, as we see these verses develop, it becomes abundantly clear that they are no friends of Jesus.

He then replies in verse 32. He said to them, Go and tell that fox. Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.

Now, that is a very brief, a very short declaration of the fact that Jesus is God's Messiah King. Just back in Luke chapter 7, verses 22 to 23, I'll put the verses there on the outline.

[9 : 07] When John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus whether he is indeed God's Messiah King, Jesus replies, Jesus replies, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard.

The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. And the deaf hear. The dead are raised up.

The poor have good news preached to them. Because way back in the Old Testament, through the prophet Isaiah, God had said he would send his king.

God himself would come to his people. I put the references there. You can look them up later in Isaiah 35 and 61. Passages in which God gives a kind of identikit picture, an identikit description of what his king will do, how they'll be able to tell when he comes, so they'll be able to spot him when he arrives.

And the point being, in Luke chapter 7, that actually Jesus ticks all the boxes. He is indeed God come to earth.

[10 : 14] I guess it's the kind of thing a small child might do if we're out of lockdown at the beginning of December. And as dad says, let's go and visit Father Christmas. And so they hit the

shops or they go to the school Christmas fair if that's on.

And you can guarantee that all that small child is thinking about is red coat, white beard, reindeer and presents. Red coat, white deer, reindeer, presents.

Of all the people they're going to see milling around in the centre of London, they mustn't miss the one. Well, finally, he gets to see him and he ticks all the boxes.

Red coat, white beard, reindeer and even the presents. Very exciting. Well, here in Luke chapter 14, verse 32, we have that same identikit picture of Jesus, the description of God's king, but in very abbreviated form.

It means, of course, there's no pleading ignorance when it comes to Jesus' identity. God wasn't hiding his king. He's out in the open. If you're not convinced about Jesus' identity, read through one of the gospel accounts.

[11 : 32] Read through Luke's gospel. Ask yourself the question, who can this be, this Jesus, if he is not God in the flesh? And then see the extraordinary compassion of Jesus as he longs for his historic people, Israel, and its capital city, Jerusalem.

Verse 34. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not.

They are the most wonderfully moving and tender words. Picture a hen. Picture the shelter, the security, the safety, the protection that she affords her little chicks as they come under her wings. It's why in verse 33, Jesus says he must finish his work. He's not going to be diverted by death threats.

Because, verse 33, Jesus doesn't view his death as an accident, but rather as the very reason he came. It's the way his work of bringing forgiveness of sins and peace with God will be accomplished through his death on the cross.

[13 : 00] So can you feel Jesus' heart for his people, his tender love, his compassion, his longing that they would return to him and enter his kingdom?

And yet, tragically, they refuse, just as they always have done. Do you see how that all illustrates the principle back in verse 30?

Some who are last will be first. Some who are first will be last. They are very much among the first. They had all the privileges of belonging to God's historic people.

They lived in the land God had given them. They had the Old Testament. They had the law. They had the covenants. They had the temple. And yet, they reject Jesus and his kingdom.

They will not enter. It's not that Jesus lacks compassion. He is longing to receive them. But they will not come in.

[14 : 00] And as we saw last week in verse 25, the door to Jesus' kingdom will close. And that is precisely what Jesus then goes on to declare in verse 35.

Behold, your house is forsaken. They're the words of the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament. The verses, again, they're on the outline. As Jeremiah pronounces, judgment and exile for God's people.

Can we see Jesus has wonderfully wide open arms. He is hugely compassionate and tender. He has come to seek and to save the lost, those who are far from him. He longs to say yes to people. But the day will come when he'll say no to people.

And it will be too late. And the point at the end of verse 35 is that although they won't recognize Jesus as God's king now, they will have to when he returns at the end of history and establishes his kingdom for all to see.

[15 : 08] Why aren't more people saved? Well, it's not that Jesus lacks compassion. Let's just pause there for a moment because that is a truly wonderful thing, isn't it?

You may be someone, perhaps you feel far from God. Perhaps you feel very acutely that you're not good enough. And yet Jesus' compassion extends to everyone.

One of the most endearing myths, enduring myths, is that Christianity is all about being good. That you have to sort yourself out before God will have you.

No. Jesus came as God's king to die on the cross precisely because none of us are good enough for God.

In other words, you see, no one is excluded. No one is too bad. No one is undeserving. Well, perhaps for others, you prayed for a friend, you prayed for a neighbor or a colleague.

[16:11] They seem uninterested or they come and hear the gospel and yet nothing really seems to go in. At which point it's so easy, isn't it, to give up praying, to give up inviting.

Is Jesus really interested? Does his compassion really extend to them? well yes it does so why don't more people follow Jesus well firstly it's not that Jesus lacks compassion secondly it's because people lack humility verse one of chapter 14 one sabbath when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the pharisees they were watching him carefully now this is a very significant dinner party because it's the last time in Luke's gospel that Jesus dines with the pharisees it's a key moment they won't come into his kingdom they won't accept him as their king they won't follow him as their savior they are very much amongst the first they are those with enormous religious privilege and heritage but they'll be lost they'll be excluded why well notice there are three kind of scenes as it were in chapter 14 verses one to four I wonder if you noticed that as you read it for us earlier so in verses one to six there's the question about the sabbath in verses seven to eleven there's then the whole issue of seating at a dinner party and dinner party etiquette at a wedding and then verses 12 to 14 who you invite to dinner now the important thing to get our heads around is that these are not simply kind of nice homely tips on how to avoid social embarrassment rather what the Lord Jesus is doing here is he is exposing the toxic religion of the pharisees they are those who won't humble themselves the key verse is there in verse 11 for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted now we know that's the key verse because it echoes precisely the reversal that we saw last week in chapter 13 verse 30 some are last who will be first some are first who will be last indeed it's a theme which runs all the way through this section of Luke's gospel this great reversal reversal so notice then first of all they won't humble themselves by listening to Jesus they won't humble themselves by listening to Jesus verses one to six have a look at those verses with me again once I was when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the pharisees they were watching him carefully and behold there was a man before him who had dropsy and Jesus responded to the lawyers and pharisees saying is it lawful to heal on the sabbath or not but they remained silent and he took him away and healed him and sent him away now this is a rerun of chapter 13 verses 10 to 17 just turn back a page I wonder if you remember it we were looking at it back in September it's another sabbath day there's a woman who has been suffering with a disabling spirit for 18 years Jesus heals her the synagogue ruler is indignant precisely because it is the sabbath and yet of course he's entirely missed the point of the sabbath which was the point of God's heavenly kingdom a place though where there'll be no more sin and no more consequences of sin no illness no disease no suffering no pain no death a perfect world and therefore of course it is entirely appropriate that Jesus heals her on the sabbath because it's just a little picture as she is restored to health it's a little picture of that perfect new creation so now fast forward to chapter 14 verses 1 to 6 have they listened have they learned no verse 1 they are watching him carefully this is a trap it's a setup notice in verse 6 it's not therefore that they can't reply it's that they won't reply it's that they won't reply they're far too wedded to their own religious system to listen to Jesus why won't more be saved because they won't humble themselves and listen to Jesus Christ it takes humility to listen to him it takes humility to recognize that you're wrong to do a u-turn and enter by that narrow door I think of someone who did the Christianity explore course who joined a bible study group and yet tragically preferred the sort of comfortable thought for the day sermons of her local church than the teaching of the real Jesus or just think of some of the mainline church denominations in this country like the pharisees so wedded to their religious systems and traditions so much part of the establishment that they won't listen to the real Jesus after all we saw didn't we last week how how completely counter-cultural Jesus teaching is there's only one way to God not many the door won't always be open there is a hell as well as a heaven no they won't humble themselves by listening to Jesus but notice secondly they won't humble themselves before Jesus they won't humble themselves before Jesus have a look again at verses 7 to 11 now he told a parable to those who were invited when he noticed how they chose the place of honor saying to them when you are invited by someone to a wedding feast do not sit down in a place of honor lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him and he who invited you both will come and say to you give your place to this person and then you'll begin with shame to take the lowest place but when you are invited go and sit in the lowest place so that when your host comes he may say to you friend move up higher then you'll be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who exalts who humbles himself will be exalted now remember Jesus is continuing to expose here the toxic religion of the ruling

establishment elite just picture the scene for moments you're invited to a smart wedding the kind of smart wedding that has a posh sit-down reception afterwards you look at the table plan and you notice that you've kind of been shoved away in a corner somewhere where you'll hardly really be able to see what's going on i know you say to yourself i'll just sneak onto that top table and i'll plop myself down there and i'll see if anyone notices well i guess most of us know exactly what's going to happen as the best man comes along and as he politely informs you that actually the seat that you are sitting in is the one that's been reserved for the bride's mother and then with your tail very firmly between your legs and in full view of everyone else you have to meekly trot back to your seat right in the corner now remember the point the point is not to give us a lesson in social etiquette it is to explain why so few people are saved we saw last week didn't we that throughout this section of luke heaven is described in terms of a glorious banquet i'll take it therefore the point is simple will we humble ourselves before jesus or will we insult ourselves to humble ourselves is to say to him i don't deserve to be in the place of honor i'm not good enough for your heavenly kingdom to humble ourselves is to accept the forgiveness of sins he offers as a free gift and that is indeed a very humbling thing to do i think of someone up in the city who came regularly to hear the message of jesus he was wonderfully appreciative in a sense valuing the teaching of jesus in so many ways and yet he wouldn't enter jesus kingdom because to do so means i have to repent i have to acknowledge and repent of living my life my way without god that i've been on the wrong track that demands humility it's something he wouldn't do so imagine for a moment that this coming week you were run over by a bus and you found yourself at the gates of heaven in front of the lord jesus and he asks you the question why should i let you in how would you reply what would you say would your answer be would your answer begin because i because i was a decent upright a loving parent a reliable colleague a pillar of the mosque a regular churchgoer well regarded by others that is not humility is it that is exalting ourselves or would it begin instead of because i would it be begin because you because you jesus died on the cross for my sins why are so few saved well because before anyone can walk through the door of jesus kingdom they need to humble themselves before him and thirdly they won't humble themselves before others verses 12 to 14 he said also to the man who had invited him when you give a dinner or a banquet do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid but when you give a feast invite the poor the crippled the lame the blind and you'll be blessed because they cannot repay you you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just notice will you they're simply uh concerns verse 12 for what they look like in in this world as they engage in the kind of payback hospitality uh you scratch my back and i'll scratch yours what they're not concerned notice verse 13 and verse 15 is god's future verdict now that of course is how every ruling elite operates just think of the city dinner or the smart social occasion it's all about who knows who think of the business or the church denomination that that simply jumps on the latest bandwagon in order to signal how virtuous they are and to make themselves look good in the eyes of others the attitude they exhibit betrays really a heart of arrogance as they jostle for position with others and recognition and yet it is inevitable because you see if we haven't humbled ourselves before jesus we won't humble ourselves before others because will you notice that the the guest list in verse 13 is precisely the same as god's guest list that we'll see next week in the parable of the great banquet just look ahead to verse 21 then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant go out quickly to the streets and the lame of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame now is it not a wonderful thing that god is like that isn't it a wonderful thing that god doesn't say now i'll choose you because you're beautiful and that will make me feel good about myself i'll choose you because you're rich and that will help me to look impressive and i'll gain from that i'll choose you because you're funny and that will make me look good and cool and i'll choose you because you're successful and it will add to my brand value no god doesn't invite people to his banquet on the basis that they'll pay him back after all spiritually speaking each one of us is poor crippled lame and blind so why aren't more people saved why is jesus so often rejected by the establishment by the elite by those who are regarded by others as the first well it's not because jesus lacks compassion it's because people lack humility now i guess for some this is a wake-up call to humble ourselves before jesus to enter his kingdom while we can we may have well have questions and objections to the claims of jesus but let's make sure that those things don't become a kind of smoke screen mere excuses for the underlying pride that simply won't repent and won't turn to jesus christ for others let's remember that luke is writing to give a certainty as we follow jesus he doesn't want his readers he doesn't want us to be unsettled dismayed or or tempted to give up on jesus or to give up

proclaiming jesus when he is rejected so let's not be concerned or unsettled when following jesus means being out of step with the establishment out of step with the ruling elite then let that keep us from following him in the first place and for those who are following him we mustn't let that keep us from proclaiming the message of jesus here in dulwich and beyond and especially no more so with christmas just around the corner i'm praying that jesus would be compassionate praying that jesus would bring many to come and hear the gospel this christmas but also praying that he would humble those who come such that they would indeed put their trust in him let me lead us in prayer together and a brief silence for reflection and now lead us in prayer a jerusalem jerusalem the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it how often would i have gathered your children together heavenly father we praise you for the great compassion of the lord jesus thank you that we see that in his determination to go to jerusalem where he will be crucified and we thank you heavenly father for this explanation not only of his compassion but of the reason why so many will not put their trust in him we tell you we are grieved by

[32 : 53] that as we look at our as we look at our as we look at where we live as we look at our our nation and we pray please that you might be at work in power to humble many and we pray especially during this time of covid would you use it to humble people and bring people into your kingdom and we ask it in jesus name amen if it's going to be worth moulder are you going to be a great simplification of all of what you could say and can talk to them in your scholarship as well you could like to help you next week subscribe and will see all that you remember as well ask for which measures are co-acks the the conversation now öve you you you you you you you exactly