

# Come and Sit at the Table

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you would turn open to the passage Luke just read, Luke 13, on page 72 in the New Testament, Luke 13.

There is, and I hope you felt this, there's an overwhelming sadness in this passage. And probably the best and truest response to the passage this morning is to weep.

I know there are preachers who weep when they preach for no other reason than to try and get an emotional effect from their hearers.

It's possible to be manipulative when you preach, but this is different. Here in Luke 13, in this last section, we're allowed to feel something of the overwhelming seriousness with which God takes us. We're allowed a glimpse into the heart of God and the sadness with which he looks at those, particularly those who are determined not to receive and not to enter the kingdom of God.

[ 1 : 06 ] Well, I mean, if you've been with us in Luke, you know some passages in Luke are funny. Like Gabriel correcting, sorry, like the priest Zechariah correcting the archangel Gabriel on his facts.

I mean, that's a funny passage. And some passages are just heartbreakingly beautiful as Jesus extends undeserved compassion to people. Some passages I find terrifying and deeply challenging. But this passage is full of tears and it ought to have that response in us, I think. Jesus lays before us the terrible fact that there are going to be people who will miss out on heaven.

There are going to be people who will be cast into hell and they will be completely surprised when it happens. And what makes it more heartbreaking is the beautiful reality of salvation that Jesus has come to bring.

Remember last week when Don was preaching? Jesus goes into the synagogue. There is a woman who is bent double. The text tells us, held captive to Satan.

[ 2 : 21 ] And Jesus heals her from her slavery because this is what the power of Christ does. He takes people who are bent and he begins to straighten us out by taking us out of bondage to Satan.

The sadness of the rejection in our passage today is that Jesus gives us two pictures of salvation which are full of this freedom and delight and kindness and grace and longing and it's this that makes our rejection of Jesus all the more shocking.

There are two shocks in the passage. One is a future shock and one is a present shock. The future shock is for those who think they ought to be in the kingdom on the last day and the present shock as we'll see in the second paragraph is for Jesus himself.

And the shock comes from the infinite distance between the love and the longing and the kindness and the grace of Jesus Christ and the ugly, stubborn reality of our self-righteous sense of entitlement.

So I warn you. And let's have a look, shall we? The first paragraph, verses 22 to 30, speak about the future shock. And we start on an ominous note in verse 22 that we're journeying to Jerusalem.

[ 3 : 49 ] It's like Luke takes the cross of Jesus and plants it in the ground as a spiritual marker for this passage. You remember since chapter 951, Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem.

He's told us that what's going to meet him there is suffering and torture and death. And now every step and every word takes place in the shadow of the cross.

And I think that makes the question of verse 23 utterly heartless. Someone said, Lord, will those who are saved be few? It looks like a completely legitimate theological respectable question.

But it's slimy. The questioner does not have any doubt that he's going to be saved. He's on the inside. The only doubt is how crowded are things going to be when I get there?

It's a theoretical, speculative question of spiritual calculation. And it assumes that God is as mean as I am. This was a kind of a preoccupation in Judaism in the day.

[ 4 : 56 ] We have notes. We have evidence. We have notes from the Sanhedrin's discussions on this. And the general view was that everyone in Israel, of course, would be saved, except for a few blatantly awful sinners.

This is very close to the way most people think today. God is going to let us all into heaven. That's his job. Except for a few terrible people like Hitler and Stalin and Pol Pot.

God is a God of love. He supports me no matter what I believe or how I behave. It's amazing to see how Jesus deals with the question. He doesn't really answer the question.

What he does is he makes two shifts in focus. Verse 24, he says, You strive to enter by the narrow door.

For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and not be able. Here are the two shifts in focus. First he says, I'm not going to go anywhere close to your philosophical speculative question.

[ 5 : 59 ] The issue is you, my friend. He says, Here is the one thing that you need to give your life to. Make every effort. Strive to. Agonise to enter by the narrow door.

Give your life to this. Seek first the kingdom of God. Because, Jesus says, The reality is, If you do not enter the narrow door now, you will not be saved then, when the kingdom comes.

Jesus says, There is a time coming when the door will close and even when you try and force it, and that's the implication in verse 24, you will not be able to open it. So you see the first shift?

It's not about other people. It's about you. And the second shift is, Jesus says, The real focus, the real issue, is not how few are going to be saved, but how many are going to be lost.

This is the big point of the passage. And it explains this desperately serious and tragic tone. It tears at the heart of Christ to think of anyone missing out of heaven, missing out on what we were made for, missing out on what he has come to bring, missing out on the eternal feast and the joy.

[ 7 : 23 ] But he has the courage, I think, and the kindness to tell us the truth. It's possible to listen to this, I think, with a sceptical heart. You know, to say, well, this sounds like science fiction.

But do you notice in verse 24, that little phrase, Jesus says, I tell you. Jesus presumes to speak as an authority on life to come.

This is very important for us. I don't have any knowledge about the life to come. My opinions are as useless as yours are. But Jesus is different.

Jesus speaks with authority about this. And his warning is that there is a time for us now to enter in, but there is a time coming when it will be too late.

The door is open now, but one day it will close. And the terrible truth is that there are some who will be closed outside. Therefore, Jesus says, strive to enter in.

[ 8 : 29 ] What does he say will happen on that day? Verse 25. When once the householder has risen and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and knock at the door saying, Lord, open to us.

And he will answer, literally, I do not know you or where you come from. And you'll begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets. But he will say, I tell you, I do not know you or where you come from.

depart from me, all you workers of iniquity. Here is the future shock. And it's a shock to those who are locked out because they're absolutely convinced that they deserve to be inside.

They feel they are entitled to be in the feast. And in verse 28, Jesus gives us a terrible picture of people raging and despairing because they're not allowed in. Why are they not allowed in?

Because they never entered by the narrow door. They never repented of their sin. What does the householder say?

[ 9 : 36 ] He says, I tell you, I do not know you or where you come from. Depart from me, you who work evil. They thought that they would be saved by their proximity to Jesus.

But they had never come to Jesus Christ and asked him to forgive their sins. They'd never entered into a genuine relationship with the Lord Jesus. They'd never said yes to him in the depth of their hearts.

They had never gone through the door. They really expect to be let in. They've had some sort of loose association with Jesus. We've eaten with you. We've drunk with you.

We were baptized as Anglicans. We deserve to be in. We're evangelicals. We go to a Bible teaching church. We're at a church that's made a bold and courageous stand.

Surely that's enough. But the key is that everyone who is outside the feast thinks they deserve to be inside the feast and everyone who's inside the feast knows they deserve to be outside the feast.

[ 10 : 38 ] That's the difference. Jesus has come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. So you see, when the householder calls them workers of iniquity, this word iniquity, it's just a general word for all evil and sin.

What is it that the only thing that can keep us out of the banquet, it's my sin. And how is it that my sin can keep me out of that heavenly banquet? Well, the answer is in verse 28 where Jesus calls the banquet the kingdom of God.

And I just, I need to repeat this. We've said this again and again and again. The kingdom of God is not a private little spiritual experience.

It is God remaking his universe and cleansing it from evil. He is remaking a new creation, taking away all that's corrupt, all that's oppressive, all that's wicked, all iniquity, if you will.

It's a complete transformation. It's a complete recreation, a new creation in which righteousness dwells, where God will restore us so that we might stand with him and sit with him.

[ 11 : 50 ] And if God is building a kingdom where there's no sin and no evil and no death, how can we get in there? The answer is the cross of Christ. That is why the story begins in verse 22 with a reference to going up to Jerusalem.

As Jesus dies on the cross, God opens the door for us into the heavenly kingdom. And it's a narrow door because Christ alone is that door.

Christ alone has died for us. If you like, the door is a cross-shaped door. And it's a narrow door because we cannot bring anything with us.

We have to leave our sin behind, our idols, our self-righteousness. It is impossible to bring any sin into the kingdom of God, which means that to enter the door we have to allow Christ to take our sin away from us.

And that's what repentance is. When the Master says to those outside, or he calls them workers of iniquity, the point is we're all workers of iniquity.

[ 13 : 00 ] we're all sinful. But the difference between those who are outside and those who are inside is that those who are inside have seen the cross of Christ as the door to life and forgiveness, have cried to God for mercy, have asked Christ to take their sins away from them, and those who are outside have never gone to Jesus and asked for mercy and forgiveness, have never truly repented of their sins, and they spend their lives seeking all sorts of things first before the kingdom of God.

I have to ask you, do you know Christ in this way as he's speaking here? Have you gone to him and asked for mercy and forgiveness?

This is Jesus' plea to us this morning, that you come to him and turn to him from sin and receive the salvation and the hope and the forgiveness that he holds out to us.

This is the future for those who have forgiveness of sins. Verse 29, it's the heavenly banquet. Men will come from east and west, from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. People will come from Australia and Canada, from Kazakhstan to France, and recline at table in that heavenly banquet.

[ 14 : 21 ] This is the promised feast from Isaiah 25. By the way, I looked up what wine on the lees means. It means wine made out of special sediment.

It's just the finest wine, the finest food, where we sit and everything that's evil is banished. We take part in a feast that is beyond our imagination.

I'm reading C.S. Lewis' book, his science fiction trilogy, and he gives a picture of a world without sin on another planet.

And someone from Earth is sent there, and when he first tastes a piece of fruit from this new world, he says, it was so different from every other taste.

It seems mere pedantry to call it a taste at all. It was like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasure, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant.

[ 15 : 25 ] One draft of this on Earth, wars would be fought, nations betrayed. It could not be classified. I think that's a lovely description of not just creation before sin, but of the heavenly banquet that Christ spreads before us.

And it's a feast for everyone who belongs to Christ, all who have put their sins behind them, everyone through history, everyone from different parts of the planet.

And it's a feast of joy and of homecoming, the same joy that the angels experience now when one sinner repents. This is why Christ came.

This is why God made the world. This is what you and I were made for, real face-to-face fellowship in the presence of God with one another.

And since the Garden of Eden, we have lost access to God's face and we have loved all sorts of other faces, but we still long for the beauty of his.

[16:30] And when God promises Abraham blessing, he's thinking of this. And when God rescues the people of Israel out of Egypt and brings them to the mountain, he takes them to the top of the mountain and he has a little feast with them which is just a foretaste of this.

And whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, his death and his resurrection, look back to the forgiveness that we have, we look forward with longing to the feast. It's this that we are doing.

But here is the solemn warning. Inside the house is delight, fellowship, satisfaction.

Outside, frustration, despair. And what tears at the heart of Jesus is that there are people who will miss out on what he wants to give and delights to give.

That's the future shock. Secondly, the present shock comes to us in verses 31 to 35. If those people miss the kingdom in the future, that will be a shock.

[17:37] But I think in these verses it is Jesus who is shocked and what shocks him is the present stubborn self-righteous rejection of the eternal banquet.

In verse 31, the very instant he finishes speaking a group of Pharisees come up to him and tell him that Herod wants to kill him. And so for his own best interest he better escape the northern regions and come down to the safety of Jerusalem.

Of course, when he does that he's going to fall into their clutches and they will put him to death.

Jesus says it's impossible, verse 23, that a prophet should perish away to Jerusalem.

If anyone's going to die it's not going to be out here in the countryside. The best place for an execution says Jesus is Jerusalem. You should know that.

If you want to kill a prophet the place to do it is in Jerusalem. I'm safe out here under Herod's rule.

But what shocks Jesus here is not that Herod wants to kill him but the heartless resistance of Israel, the rejection of the love of God and Jesus suddenly is overwhelmed with pain and he speaks to us some of the most heart-rending words in scriptures.

[18:57] Verse 34, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, he says, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you. 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. I tell you, you will not see me until the day you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus speaks on behalf of God and he speaks directly to his people and he pictures himself as a mother hen and he says, what I've come to do is to gather you under the shelter of my grace, to gather us personally to him to protect us and to provide for us.

And when in a couple of chapters he comes to the edge of Jerusalem, what does he do? In chapter 19, if you just flick over there, verse 41, when he first seized the city, verse 41 of chapter 19, when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, would that even today you knew the things that make for peace, but now they are hid for your eyes.

What makes Jesus weep is the stubbornness of heart, the resistance of people who will not come to him. It's very interesting.

If you go back to that paragraph in chapter 13, there are three desires, three times the word want is used. The first is Herod wants to kill Jesus.

[20:51] The second is that Jesus wants with all his heart to gather his people. And the third is people don't want to be gathered. You would not.

there's no great intellectual objection to Jesus. It's just stubborn, rebellious hearts that will not repent of sin.

And the reason people reject the gift of life and the gift of eternity is that we've got other things that we want more. And the more Christ offers the gift of forgiveness and grace, the more tightly we hold our idols, the more we have to join the Pharisees and say, crucify him.

But I think Jesus opens the heart of God to us with staggering clarity. We see something of the love and yearning, the desire of God to make us secure, to draw us to his bosom, to protect us from every fox.

And as Jesus looks towards the execution on the cross, he wants to spread his wings and gather us to his heart. It's astonishing.

[ 22 : 02 ] I mean, what possible reason could there be to drive the majesty of the eternal God to send his son to be butchered for us? I mean, what is it that moves God to be like a mother, to set aside her dignity, to send her son for the sake of others?

And I think what's even more astonishing is that all that Christ has done is of absolutely no use if we will not come to him. And what possible reason, what's the baseline reason that we do not repent? It's simply we just don't want to. And it's this that so affects Jesus. The reason that people are saved is not because of the lack of grace of God, it's because of the hardness of their own heart. It's not that we are seeking God and that God is stingy and makes things difficult for us to come to him. The opposite is true. God is seeking us. God has sent Christ. And those who resist him and reject him do so because they just don't want to and will not enter through the door. It's not that God is unwilling to save. It's that we are unwilling to come to Christ. It's not the God who is ungracious and unloving. It's we who are unthankful and unresponsive.

[ 23 : 22 ] It's not God who puts up barriers to us coming to him. It is our will that keeps us. And it's this that's the present shock for Jesus.

And Jesus says, your house Israel is forsaken. You're not going to see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

So it's a very sombre passage for us this morning. And I think we have two reasons to weep. The first is we need to weep for those who are refusing Christ's love.

I don't think it's possible for us to think about this deeply without tears. This is far more tragic than accidental death. This is eternal death. But the truth is that there will be people who will be outside on the last day who think they deserve to be inside.

But the only reason that they're outside is because of their stubborn refusal to enter by the door.

And we should weep at the enormity of their defiance and their loss.

[ 24 : 33 ] And I think we ought to turn our weeping into prayer. I was in a group this week where we went around the room and we shared how we had become Christians, how we'd come to faith in Christ.

it's very interesting, almost every person who went round the circle was able to name someone who had been praying for them to receive salvation.

Sometimes we didn't discover the name of that person for a long time after we'd become Christian. Sometimes it was a close friend, sometimes a family member, sometimes a person we hardly knew. but every one of us had people praying for us personally by name. And I want to encourage you to do this as a practice, to turn your tears into prayers, to pray not generally but specifically and personally for people that they would come to Christ, that they would enter through the narrow door, that they would be there in the banquet.

that's the first weeping. But there is a second weeping and I think it's that we should weep for joy because of the cross of Christ. It ought to move us very deeply that Jesus left heaven to go to the cross for us, that he set his face to go to Jerusalem where he knew he would be executed brutally, a sacrifice for sins.

[ 26 : 03 ] And he did it to deal with our iniquities, he did it to deal with everything that would keep us out of the banquet. He did it to open the door, to create a place for us at the table, to experience the joy of God eternally.

We would be very thankful that Jesus died to spread the wings of grace over us, to restore us to what we were created for, to live in the presence of God, to delight in him and to share his delight in us and each other.

Because in the cross of Christ, he was put out so that we might be welcomed in. All protection was removed from him as he suffered the consequences of our sin so that we might step under his wings and receive his divine protection.

He was shattered and scattered and cast out heart of God's presence. He was made whole, gathered to him, made right, welcomed in forever and ever.

together. So let us kneel and pray. Holy Father, we come before you this morning humbled by this message of your love for us and all people.

[ 27 : 29 ] Though we are wicked and our tendency is to reject and deny you, you have reached out to us and long for us to be restored to you. You chose suffering and death in order that we may have life, and we thank you and praise you for your grace to us.

And yet, like you, we are also grieved, knowing that not everyone chooses to receive your gift of life. We plead with you, Father, have mercy and change the hearts of those who are too proud, too distracted, too focused on their immediate needs and desires to see how lost they are.

Open their eyes that they may recognize and accept your generous invitation and repent and be changed by you. And we ask, Jesus, that you would instill within each of us a deep compassion and concern for those who do not know you.

Let our hearts be transformed by the desires of your heart in order that we may be a representation and manifestation of your love here on earth. Lord, in your mercy, here I pray.

These are dark times, Lord. We are living in the midst of war, global and personal economic crisis, environmental destruction, cultural idolatry of self and wealth, familial disintegration, and disunity and corruption within your church.

[ 28 : 49 ] But you, Lord, are sovereign and hold all things in your powerful, good, and trustworthy hands. We know that it is your desire to bring all people under the protection of your wings.

And we know that you are at work in visible and in invisible ways. Please, Lord God, continue your work. Comfort the broken, give wisdom and guidance to the perplexed, provide opportunities of peace and reconciliation to those in conflict.

Bring about faith on earth in order that people may see your light in the darkness, that they may hope where hope seems foolish, and that they may be redeemed and become instruments of your redemption.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Thank you, Lord, for the faithfulness of those in this church who labor every week to serve you and to serve the people of this congregation.

Thank you also for all the missionaries that we as a church have chosen to support, including in particular Catherine Gwinnett of the North American Indian Mission in Campbell River, Sharon Thompson with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Burkina Faso, Brian McConaughy with the Ratnak Foundation in Cambodia, and Doug and Anna Marie Graham in Asia.

[ 30 : 03 ] Bless these, your servants, here at home and abroad, with clear vision to see your purposes, willingness to obey, strength to endure, and fulfillment and deep joy in the work they do.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. In faith and thanksgiving, we offer up the names of those among us who are in need of your help, including Margaret, Paul, Rowena, Lee, Gail, Ron, Ben and Nancy, and Mardeth and Gary Hewitt and the Rennie family as they mourn the loss of their mother, Lee Rennie.

We also lift up to you the troops in Afghanistan, and especially pray your protection over Christopher. And in silence now, we add those who we personally know who are in need of your healing, comfort, guidance, or salvation.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Lord, we end by asking that you grant us all humble and obedient hearts to seek your kingdom and to seek the ways in which we can be used by you in this church, in our families, and in the world.

Help us to make the most of this present time as we know it is short, the door is narrow, and the decisions we make now are so critical to the eternal well-being of us and those around us. Give us wisdom and discernment to know what to pursue and what not to.

[ 31 : 35 ] And in the midst of our busy daily lives, let us never forget or forsake the one thing needful, which is intimacy with you. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.