

Luke 13:22-30 AM

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[0 : 01] Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer, amen. You may be seated. Amen. Well, for the next three months, we will be joining Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

We're going to be in chapters 13 through 17 of the Gospel of Luke, and if you could join me on page 873 in your pew Bible, we'll be starting in verse 22 of a section that proclaims the urgency of the kingdom, the joy of being able to enter now, and the extravagance and the madness of God's grace, and it all begins in verse 22 of chapter 13.

He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying towards Jerusalem. It's one of those verses that when you get in the Gospels, you read over it because you feel like there's no juicy stuff in this.

Let's get to the red letters, right? But here, Luke actually pulls to the surface the deep inner logic of Jesus' mission and ministry. This goes all the way back to chapter 9, verse 51.

[1 : 26] Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, and here he continues to journey towards Jerusalem, and then in chapter 17, he will continue on his way to Jerusalem. In chapter 19, he will make his way up to Jerusalem, and when he catches the sight of Jerusalem, he weeps over Jerusalem.

There is this vast movement through the whole Gospel like a mighty rushing river where Jesus' whole life is depicted as a mission towards the city that is going to reject him. Jerusalem, as you know, is a place of great spiritual significance, not only in Luke's Gospel, but in the whole of Scripture.

It's the center of worship in the Old Testament, the place where God's presence dwelt in a magnificent and glorious and holy way, where sacrifices were made and prayers were offered. It was the source of salvation and the epicenter of God's action in the world. When Jesus came on the scene, it is the first place where he is hailed as the light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. It's the last place where he goes to die and rise again. It's where he descends his disciples after he's risen again and says, wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. And it's where he meets his disciples and commissions them to bring the Gospel to the whole entire world.

[2 : 40] So when we read in Luke chapter 13, verse 22, that Jesus is journeying towards Jerusalem, we bring carried along on the vast current of Jesus' deep and profound mission to the world.

And we get to join him for the next three months. Chapters 13 through 17. And as Jesus is surrounded by crowds and living under the shadow of the cross, there are a number of questions that are raised about salvation, like who will be saved, how and when.

And our section in verse 23 begins with that question, Lord, will those who are saved be few? It's a question we may ask in our own context.

We don't know who asked it or why, but it's very clear that Jesus is not interested in answering this question. He reframes the question as he so often does.

He responds in a completely different way and takes the conversation in a completely different direction. And this is classic Jesus. Somebody comes to him with a general theological question and he personalizes it and infuses it with all the existential and spiritual urgency he possibly can.

[3 : 50] He shifts the perspective so that he's actually posing a question to the person that asked him a question. And this is very gracious of him. Because what it reveals about Jesus is he interacts with people in such a way that he doesn't just come to them on our terms.

He brings us to him on his terms. Which helps us find solid rock when everything else in our lives is shifting sand. So what I want us to do is actually not that complicated this morning.

I don't want to overcomplicate this. I'm just going to take what Jesus does in three parts. I'm calling it his non-answer in three parts. Number one, enter.

Number two, enter the narrow door. And number three, enter now. So enter. It's an invitation. Look at this in verse 24. He says, strive to enter.

It's a command. It's a summons. In the Greek, it's in the plural. You all enter. Or if you're from the south, all y'all enter. It's, uh... So this is very fascinating.

[4 : 56] Think about this for a second. What Jesus is depicting here. The picture of salvation is not, Lord Jesus, would you come into my heart? Although that's a really good thing to pray for. Lord, come dwell in me.

But the picture of salvation is actually about the person entering into a reality that is much bigger than themselves. So, a couple illustrations. I think modern architecture actually reveals something of this spatially very helpfully.

So I have a neighbor that has this atrocity of a modern house. It's beautiful. I can't tell you the number of neighbors who stop and just spend about ten minutes going, what is happening here? Because it's a whole facade of gray concrete with no windows. And there is a skinny door in it. And it looks incredibly uninviting, like a World War II bunker.

And, uh... But the magnificent thing that you don't know from the outside is that if you open that skinny door and you go inside, it reveals a skylight that is two stories up, flooding light down from the sky.

[5 : 54] And the whole back wall of the house is solid glass, light flooding in from the back. And so there's this picture of you walk through this door and you enter into a world of light.

Or, before I moved here to Vancouver a couple years ago, I visited the Catholic Cathedral in Los Angeles. I had a lot of friends tell me, you've got to go to this place if you like architecture. And I like to think that in another life I will be an architect.

And one of the beautiful things about this church is that you don't just open and come straight into the main sanctuary. You actually enter through a relatively small door for a cathedral.

And you have to walk a long, narrow hallway the full length of the cathedral, which takes you a few minutes until you take a sharp right-hand turn 90 degrees and you see a baptismal font in the shape of a cross.

And then you take another sharp 90 degrees, and from there is revealed a vast sea of thousands of chairs, all facing a singular wooden cross that is stuck into the ground.

[6 : 59] And surrounding all those chairs are 30 tapestries about 12 feet high and about 15 feet wide that are depicting different Christians from all nations and from all generations, and they are not facing the congregation.

They too are facing the wooden cross stuck into the ground. Salvation is pictured not as asking Jesus to enter your heart in your house, but as you personally entering into Jesus' house.

A much bigger reality than yourself. The reality of Jesus and his kingdom and his guests and his sovereign lordship and love. Jesus gives a picture of this at the very end of our passage.

Join me. In page, I mean, in verse 28, he says, In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And this is the positive element. When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, then the negative element, but you yourselves cast out.

Verse 29, And people will come from east and west and from north and south and recline at the table in the kingdom. And behold, some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last.

[8 : 10] So the kingdom of God is pictured as a big feast for people from every generation in every corner of the earth. And it's a feast where the world's values and the world's way of honoring people are turned upside down.

Where the last are first and the first are last. Where the exalted are humbled and where the humbled are exalted. And we see this throughout the book of Luke. We're going to see it for the next three months to come.

The kingdom of God is pictured as a lavish wedding feast. As a great banquet. As a place where you would never want to deny the invitation to such a wonderful party. Jesus is the master of the party.

He is the host. He welcomes his people. He provides everything for his people. And he cherishes and relishes being with his people at the party. And he's also the waiter who serves his people hand and foot at the party.

These meals are depicted as a place where all our human longings for joy and intimacy and love and belonging and meaning and redemption and restoration are finally fulfilled.

[9:11] In other words, Luke depicts the kingdom through the words of Jesus as something so beautiful and joyful that to miss out would be the greatest possible grief.

That's the image of weeping and gnashing of teeth in verse 28. Jesus says it will be so sweet that we should do everything we can to enter. Strive to enter, he says.

And he loves us so much that he doesn't just leave it as an invitation. He says it as a summons and as a command. He says, don't sit back and hope you'll get in. Strive. Struggle. Fight.

It's a word that describes the strenuous activity of an athlete. Daily preparation. Daily exercise. Daily practice. Daily nutrition.

Jesus is describing the Christian life here not as a passive waiting for something to happen to you, but as a daily practice of actively entering into joyful dependence on God's grace.

[10:10] So this is the first part of Jesus' non-answer. Enter. Strive to enter. It's a command that is a gift. We do not build and establish the kingdom. We get to enter in and enjoy what Jesus himself has already built.

But the question is then raised, how do we enter? That's the command. How do we enjoy it? What's the entry point into the great feast?

And how do we experience this marvelous and upside-down world where the master serves and where the humbled are exalted? And that's what Jesus then gives us in the second part of verse 24. Enter through the narrow door. In other words, responding to Jesus, repenting, is like entering through a narrow door.

All are welcome to this feast, but there's only one way to enter into it. Now, in our Western culture, many people believe that there are many ways to God. Like the road to heaven is like a big, vast interstate highway.

[11:10] Or, more appropriate to our Vancouver city, the road to salvation is like a public transport system. You can take the bus, the ferry, the SkyTrain, the Canada Line, or if you're like me, any choice of bike lanes.

It's your choice. You'll get to the same destination, but you might have a very different experience along the way. But Jesus insists that although this banquet hall is vast, and although the banquet table is long and has lots of chairs for anybody who wants to enter, the door to get into it is very narrow.

You cannot bring anything with you into it. Only you can enter, and only you can enter through only this way. In another gospel, Jesus says, I am the door, picking up on similar imagery.

John chapter 10, if anyone enters by me, he will be saved. And in the very same breath, Jesus goes on to talk about his death and resurrection. I will lay down my life, and I will pick it up again.

And so I think the imagery of a narrow door is meant to point us to Jesus. But not just the person of Jesus is the way into the kingdom feast, but what he does for us. Think about that.

[12:22] It's his saving work. So it's not just his person. It's his loving death. It's his triumphant resurrection. So actually, the means by which we enter is a person who has done something for us.

At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus himself tells us that all of salvation history, like Moses and the Psalms and the prophets, they all funnel like a mighty river into and through this one narrow door. His death and his resurrection. It's narrow, not because it's just for a few, but because it focuses on Christ alone. It's narrow, not because it's really hard to fit through.

It's narrow because it focuses on his one work of salvation and deliverance. It's narrow, not because Jesus doesn't want people to get in. It's narrow because he wants people to know the only way to get in.

It's narrow because no one can go through it but you, and only you can decide if you will go through it. And so we're left with a very particular vision of the Christian life according to Jesus.

[13:31] A very particular vision of what it means to strive to enter through the narrow door. We're not striving to build a kingdom or to pay our entrance fee or to earn our keep or to prove our worth.

We are striving to live our life through another person's life. Striving to enter the kingdom through the king's compassion. Striving to enter the kingdom through the king's kindness.

Striving to enter the kingdom through the king's love and mercy and forgiveness. So I think what Jesus is talking about here is actually something quite personal and relational. It's what Paul will describe later as union with Christ.

Christ in me, the hope of glory. That no matter who we are, and I think this is a helpful implication of this. No matter who we are and where we are on this side of heaven, the door is open to us and it's present to us.

Because Jesus is present to us. And Jesus is calling us. So whether you wake up in the morning or whether you're lying awake at night, whether you've gone to the office to pick up some files or you've gone to school to pick up your children, whether you just had an argument with your neighbor or your mother or your spouse, whether you just got a promotion or you failed your first exam, whether you gave in to temptation or you surrendered to addiction, whether you received a diagnosis or you face inevitable loss, no matter where we are or who we are in this life, this side of heaven, there is a door open to us in our prison cell.

[15:06] Because it is the Lord Jesus himself, the risen Lord who is present to us. And he calls us and he says, enter through me into the lush and vast reign of my mercy and my grace and the freedom of my forgiveness and my love.

Come feast with me and my people. So Jesus says first to us, enter. Second, he says, enter through the narrow door.

And then he says, enter now. And this is the significant and the sharp edge of this passage. It raises the question, what happens if I do not enter now?

If I do not respond to Jesus now, what happens? Verse 24. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Notice the time reference in verse 25. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door. I think this is a reference to Christ's second coming. And you begin to stand outside and knock at the door.

[16:10] Saying, Lord, open to us. Then he will answer you, I do not know where you came from. Then you will begin to say, we ate and we drank in your presence. You taught us in our streets.

But he will say, I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So it's actually quite a simple story, even though it has a very sharp edge to it. Jesus has come back. He has gathered everyone into his house.

And now the entrance to the house is shut. And people come knocking and say, hey, now we know that we want to enter. And Jesus says, I do not know where you've come from. And they are not allowed to enter.

And they spend a life of eternal grief and anguish. And the main point that Jesus is trying to say is that he's saying, the salvation that I have come to bring. And that I am. And that I'm bringing right before you is a limited time offer.

[17:11] You have limited time to enter. And now is the time to enter, not later. Because if you put it off, you're bitterly going to regret it. Now, I want to make an important clarification here.

Because I think this is pastorally significant for us. Grace has no sin limit, even though it has a time limit here. What do I mean by that? There's no sin too great for Jesus to forgive.

There's no sin that can disqualify us from entering and receiving the kingdom of God if we receive Jesus' love and submit to his lordship. There is no limit to the number of times that we can repent and turn to the Lord and that we will experience his wonderful mercy.

Grace has no sin limit, but it does have a time limit. In other words, the time to respond to grace is now, not later. Our decisions now really have eternal significance for later.

How we respond to Jesus now really will affect how Jesus responds to us then. And the good news of the text is that there are going to be lots of people coming into the kingdom from every corner of the world.

[18:18] It's going to be a massive feast. It's going to be extravagant. But the question that Jesus is putting to us right here in the sharpest possible way is, Will you be one of the people that enters the kingdom? If not, great grief awaits.

Because you will not have another chance. Now there's this quote from an Anglican bishop a number of years ago named J.C. Ryle, and he puts it in a startling way.

He says, Jesus reveals here the awful fact that many may see what is right when it is too late for them to be saved. There comes a time when many will repent too late, believe too late, grieve for sin too late, pray too late, be anxious about salvation too late, and long for heaven too late.

He said, He said, He said, He said, Thousands will wake up in another world and be convinced about truths which they refuse to believe on earth. Earth is the only place in God's creation where there is any infidelity, and this is the sharp line.

Hell itself is nothing but truth known too late. Now that is somewhat startling, but I think it helps us feel the sharp edge of Jesus' teaching.

[19 : 31] There is an existential and personal urgency to Jesus' offer of mercy. There is nothing more important in your life right now, Jesus is saying, than responding to me and receiving me and believing me and entering in through me.

And it's important for us to see that what motivates Jesus' heart here, what motivates his urgency and the sharpness of his teaching, is actually his heartbreaking compassion for his people. Skim your eyes over to the passage for next week, verse 34 in chapter 13.

He says to Jerusalem, Oh Jerusalem, oh 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 were not willing.

You hear the longing of Jesus' heart there? It's like a mother who wants to gather her children in close to her, and is very ready to gather the children in. Oh how often I would have gathered you in. And so the main point of Jesus' teaching is this personal urgency of the present moment. This is the year of the Lord's favor. Enter now or never, says Jesus.

[20 : 45] Later will be too late. This is not an offer you want to miss out on. So it leaves me with a final question. Because this is pretty sharp.

Is everybody alright? I want you to know that this is part of Jesus' grace that he speaks this honestly with us. This is part of Jesus' goodness to us.

That he does not hold back the truth. This is part of Jesus' beating heart for us. That he would be this urgent with us. And some of you may be feeling, wow, I'm really put on the spot here by the Lord Jesus.

And what Jesus wants from that is he wants you to come to him and respond to him and to experience the fact that no matter how far you have been humbled by his teaching, Jesus loves to exalt the humble.

That's why in Matthew, in his very first sermon, he says, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And the question that I want to consider with you just for the last few minutes here is what keeps us, what keeps you from responding to Jesus?

[21 : 54] What keeps you from entering? What keeps you from feeling the urgency and the glory of what he is offering you? And I think there are a million things we could point to, but I'll point to three.

And the first is we tend to feel that other things are more important and urgent. Right? We'll see this in weeks to come in Luke chapter 14.

Jesus is throwing a big wedding party and he goes and invites a bunch of people and people give a series of excuses to him about why they can't come now and they'll come later. And what's scary about it, I think David highlighted this yesterday in our teaching day, is just how relatable all the excuses are to us.

So it's like, I've bought a house, I've got to attend to my property. I've got to work and make money. I've got family that needs attention. And I think we could probably add, I've got exams to study for and emails to respond to and a retirement to prepare for.

It's all the normal stuff of daily life, which the cares of this world, which could lead us to Jesus, which can lead us to experience joy and peace and trusting him.

[22 : 58] But they can also have the possibility of choking out our spiritual life. Their care is growing up and distracting us and making us numb and unresponsive to the Lord Jesus.

So it's often this simple feeling that other things are more pressing in my life right now. Jesus will always be there. I can get to him later. Second thing, what keeps us from responding to Jesus, is assumptions based on either social proximity or theological learning.

The sense of entitlement, of course I belong. Look at verse 26. What is the excuse they give to Jesus? Jesus, you should let us in because we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.

So who is this parable pointed at? It's pointed at those who attend church. It's pointed at those who spend time in Jesus' presence frequently.

It's pointed at those who read the Bible and study the Bible and listen to lots of sermons and love to have podcasts of even more sermons. It's those who believe, it's those who believe, I belong.

[24 : 05] And I know the Apostles' Creed. And I know all this stuff. And so of course I'm part of the kingdom of God. But Jesus says here, just because you belong and just because you know, doesn't mean you've really entered in.

He says spiritual pedigree, spiritual history, the family tree is not going to get you into heaven. Just showing up and just knowing what you need to know will not get you into the kingdom.

Just being part of the group and the right crowd will not get you into the kingdom. You personally have to respond to my invitation and my offer and enter in. Nobody else can do this for you.

Not your spouse or your mother or your daughter. You personally have to repent of the evil that has infected your heart and find in Jesus the source of all your life and joy. And the third thing that keeps us from responding to Jesus is our addiction to the evil that we must reject in order to receive him.

And we see this in Jesus' response in verse 27. He says to them after they've given him the reasons why they should be let in, I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me and here it is, all you workers of evil.

[25 : 17] Now that's not something that we normally put on poster boards, quoting Jesus, right?

One person summarized it this way. They said, Entry into the kingdom depends not merely on hearing the message of Jesus or experiencing the presence of Jesus, but above all on turning from evil in repentance toward Jesus.

We often do not want to respond to Jesus because we know it will cost us the evil that we so love. It will cost us the sin that we've become so reliant on.

Whether it's money or pornography or entertainment or consumption or just our own personal entitlement and resentment and bitterness, in order to enter the kingdom, we have to enter through a narrow door where we can't bring anything with us, where we have to turn our backs on everything that has enslaved us, and we have to enter in receiving everything from the king.

And notice how effectively Jesus has turned the question around on his questioner by the end of this passage. His questioner asked, Will the saved be few? And Jesus fundamentally asked the questioner, Will the saved be you?

The king is here, Jesus says. The feast is prepared. The door is open, but it's not going to be open forever. So strive, please strive to enter through that narrow door.

[26 : 43] It is a vast world of grace on the other side, full of light and joy and mercy and love. Do not delay. Do not put off the decision. Nothing is more important. Enter now before it's too late.

I've prepared a place for you. My brothers and sisters, I speak these things to you. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.