

Luke 13:22-35 "Kingdom Participation"

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[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We are back in Luke chapter 13 this morning, although what a great break it was last week for our Express Grace conference. If you missed the sermon last Sunday about how remembering the gospel drives us to mission both here and everywhere, or the great panel discussion that we had with some of our global mission partners, those are both online. You can go hear those. I encourage you to check those out there. But we've been in a series walking through Luke, listening right now to Jesus teaching us about his kingdom as he journeys toward the cross.

In the passage we just finished, Jesus taught us about kingdom significance, what matters, what's important. And this morning, it's about kingdom participation. Who gets to be a part of his kingdom? As I read, listen to Jesus' passion, his emotional intensity. There's stern warnings, deep angst and grief at the end. We're going to read it Luke 13 beginning at verse 22. This is God's holy word. It's the only thing you'll hold this week that is absolutely reliable. The only thing you'll read that is unfailingly for your good. Luke 13 verse 22. Jesus went on his way through towns and villages teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few? And he said to them, strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door saying, Lord, open to us, then he will answer you,

I do not know where you come from. And then you will 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 where you come from.

Depart from me, all you workers of evil. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west and from north and south and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first. And some are first who will be last.

[2 : 4 9] At that very hour, some Pharisees came and said to him, get away from here 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 finished my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.

Oh, 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. Let's pray together.

Father, we're grateful for your word, especially because it tells us about Jesus, your son, our only hope, our great joy.

Would you show us him clearly and brilliantly this morning. Teach us through your word, Holy Spirit, come and speak to our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name.

[4 : 11] Amen. Someone was telling me earlier this morning that there is a football game tonight, which was really confusing to me since like some of you, I was certain that football season ended in early January.

I think that's how it should be. But apparently, the Patriots and the Eagles are playing a game in Minneapolis tonight and probably in front of a close to sellout crowd in a pretty full stadium.

But imagine that you actually flew up there after this service in time to be there for the game because the Patriots are your team.

And so you fly up there and you meet all your friends there outside the stadium. You've got your number 12 Tom Brady jersey on. You put some eye black underneath your eyes.

You are fired up for this game, man. You are, you're marching toward the stadium chanting and ready to go and you get up there to the gate and there's this lady with a scanner and your friends are pulling out these like strange little rectangular pieces of paper and handing them to her and walking in.

[5 : 25] And so you're just kind of walking along with all your friends headed into the game and she says, I'm sorry sir, you don't have a ticket. Now imagine that when she says that you respond this way, ma'am, I grew up a Patriots fan.

I've got a picture of me coming home from the hospital in a Patriots onesie. All my life I'm the biggest fan I have been to every single game this year, home and away.

I haven't missed one. You don't understand what a huge Patriots fan I am. I'm sorry sir. You can't come in.

And you start to get a bit worked up at this point, right? Like this is not okay. But all my friends are in there and we hang out and watch these games together and talk football all the time.

I'm sorry sir. And perhaps she would add if she had heard this sermon which would seem unlikely, association does not equal participation.

[6 : 37] In other words, apparently you didn't consider thoughtfully what qualified someone to be a part of the Super Bowl. And that would be really sad for you, wouldn't it?

To have made that trip all the way up to Minnesota and be left out in a frigid winter listening to the game in a cold parking lot on a radio.

But Jesus is cautioning us in this passage about an even more subtle and even more significant situation to consider.

And that's not considering thoughtfully what qualifies someone to be a part of the kingdom of God. And that would be so much more tragic for you to have made the trip to church so many times and end up missing out on the glory of the kingdom.

I think that's partially why you hear Jesus' emotions come out so strongly in this passage. He wants you to understand and experience what it takes truly to participate in the kingdom.

[7 : 47] To be a child of God rather than of Satan. To be on the side of good rather than of evil. To be welcomed into heaven rather than left out in hell.

How would you determine that? How would you know if you were in a right relationship with God? Jesus wants us to know. Let's look at how he teaches us in this passage.

At first he highlights the importance of true participation. Verse 22. He went on his way through towns and villages teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.

He's been headed there for several chapters now. He's going there to die. Right? He's not been unclear about that. And someone said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few?

And Jesus' response, strive to enter through the narrow door for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Hmm.

[8 : 50] Not really a straightforward answer to the question. Right? He answers this question from the crowd with a command not to consider how many will be saved.

Seems like that would have been an easy thing. Just give us a number. But rather to consider whether you will be. Now let me remind you what these crowds of Jews following Jesus would have believed at this point in time.

Most of the influential Jewish teaching during Jesus' day was teaching that more or less all or at least most of the Jews would be in the kingdom.

They would be saved a part of the kingdom of God. Perhaps a few of the worst would get left out depending on who you read. But most or all would be in.

On the other hand, most or all Gentiles were left out. Yes, for most of them there was the occasional Gentile who got grafted into the family of God, got through all the right ceremonies, could become a part of that and be a part of the kingdom.

[10 : 01] But most of the Gentiles were left out. And Jesus will actually say in this passage, in answer to the question how many will be saved, fewer Jews than you expect.

Fewer of those who think they're in and more. More Gentiles than you expect. And here goes Jesus again turning our expectations upside down, right?

Insiders out and outsiders in. The religious missing out on the kingdom and the irreligious walking right in. Sounds like a warning for people sitting in a place like this, doesn't it?

Jesus says, strive to enter through the narrow door for many will seek to enter and not be able.

Now he doesn't mean that very few people will be saved. He's actually just told us in the previous passage about the great growth of the kingdom and how many get to be a part of it. He's going to say that again in just a moment.

[11 : 10] But he does start by focusing on those who are not saved. What does he mean by a narrow door with these many who are not able to get in?

It can be confusing. So first, one thing he doesn't mean is this passage contradicting the one where it says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened to you. Is this a contradiction? No, it's not. Jesus is not painting a picture here as we continue to read through the passage where these people are left out standing, banging on the door saying, God, we need your help.

We trust Jesus. We want a relationship with you. Only to find God coldly locking the door and walking away, refusing them entrance.

That's not the biblical picture of God at all. These many instead, as we keep reading, we find out they're Jews who are religious.

[12 : 19] They're the insiders. They're the ones who've been around the things of God and they are seeking to enter the kingdom of God on their own terms. That's what we find out as we keep reading.

They presume, like the Super Bowl fan, that their association with Team Jesus is enough. Well, if that's not true participation, then what is it?

What does the narrow door mean? Well, Jesus has been teaching about that every time he's opened his mouth in these chapters, hasn't he? In chapter 12, over and over, he said, it's your connection to Jesus that saves you.

You have to trust the king to be a part of the kingdom. Eternity hinges on your active embrace of Jesus. And in chapter 13, he starts to show us a little bit more what that means.

What does that look like? He says, repent, or you too will perish. And he says that repeatedly. Repent. Turn from your sin and yourself and trust Jesus.

[13 : 29] Give up hope of deserving salvation, of earning your way into the kingdom, and trust the Savior King. See, the narrow door is not to say how few are saved, but rather that there is one way in.

Jesus. Not knowing a lot about him, not hanging around his people, not talking like him.

No, it's easier than that and harder than that at the same time. It's repent and believe the good news.

You must actually see your own emptiness, which is really hard, and embrace Jesus desperately and fully with your heart and all your life.

That's true participation in God's kingdom. But see, there's a subtle fraud out there that still lives today, and Jesus tells a brief story to highlight it, to highlight the deception of mere association.

[14 : 45] Verse 25, the people who want in knock, and the master says, I don't know where you come from. Verse 26, then you will begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.

Jesus, Jesus, we hung out. You were here, you were around with us. Remember, we ate dinner that time. We heard lots of things that you said. You're clearly just confused.

Do you see the deception and the warning that Jesus gives to those who've been around him a lot? Jesus, we heard what you taught. We grew up around the Bible all the time.

We memorized a lot of it. I mean, honestly, Jesus, what do you think we are? Muslim? Hindu? Atheist? No way!

We must be Christians. You don't remember us? Check the Southwood attendance register. We signed in. We were there.

[15 : 51] All of our friends were there with us. You know, our family, they're in there too. I'm sure there's just been a mistake, an oversight. Do you see how deceptive mere association can be?

How being around the things of God and the people of God can give you a temptation to believe there's something genuine happening when it's not? It's a struggle that some don't have.

I don't know any atheists in Huntsville who are planning on explaining to God how to get into heaven. That's not their intention. But I know lots of professing Christians whose answers sound a lot like the people knocking and hearing Jesus say, I don't know where you come from.

You never trusted me. You never shaped your life around my kingdom. You just enjoyed your coffee, talked to some friends, watched from a distance, and were content in your own associations.

It made you happy. And so you plead your association with religious people and religious organizations, and Jesus says, verse 27, I tell you, I do not know where you come from.

[17 : 06] Depart from me, all you workers of evil. In that place where you're going, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. You're going to see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets in, but you yourselves cast out.

And that's the devastation of mere association. This is no football game that you're missing out on to sit in a cold parking lot.

It's a lot more serious than that. You can't just be a decent guy in the middle, just didn't get everything you wanted. Now, Jesus says to those who are not in the kingdom, workers of evil.

workers of evil cast out into a place with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That's the warning. He wants you to know the truth about the eternal difference between mere association and true participation, lest you suffer eternal torment.

[18 : 12] If you know you're here this morning just playing a game, please hear this warning. Please consider your own heart. It's a serious warning.

So who gets in? Boy, we really need to know now, don't we? Who gets in? Verse 28 gives us a window into the kingdom feast. Who's in there? What's the identity of the true participants?

Some of the ones in the kingdom are the ones you'd expect, the usual suspects. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets.

Hmm. So, so religious association doesn't disqualify you. Those are pretty religious people. Maybe you have to be a really holy Jew.

Maybe it's all about one's performance. Except that Abraham said his wife was his sister to protect himself and violate her. And he had a son by his maidservant.

[19 : 19] And Jacob was a serial liar and deceiver. So, no. But, Abraham believed God.

And it was counted to him as righteousness. He was called a friend of God. That's what the prophets were famous for, wasn't it? Calling God's people to repent and to trust him again.

So, being a Jew is not enough, Jesus says. But even Jews who fail can be saved by repentance and faith.

So, I look in the stadium, so to speak, and sure enough, some of my church friends are in there. But there's even bigger news. There's unusual suspects.

I don't know if that's a thing. But verse 29, people coming from east and west, north and south, and reclining at table in the kingdom of God. Some who are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

[20 : 23] Right there, as you look in at the head of the table in the kingdom feast, Gentiles, those who seem the least likely to be included, the unclean, the ones with no association with God's people at all.

Jesus, this is not okay. They're not supposed to be there. It's not how we do things. I thought you said something about a narrow door, and now there just seems to be doors everywhere.

North, south, east, and west, come on in, everybody. Can we go back to the narrow one where only we get in? Come on, Jesus. They're letting anyone in these days.

People not even wearing team colors. They're Vikings fans up here in Minneapolis. They don't even root for the Patriots. They have no connections at all. Look what I'm wearing. I got the jersey and the eye black.

I'm in, right? I used to drive by that guy mowing his grass on my way to church on Sundays. She got pregnant in high school, didn't even keep the baby.

[21 : 26] He's never been to Bible study. How can someone like that be in the kingdom while a decent, church-going person like me is left out?

How are all these half-hearted Patriots and Eagles and couldn't-care-less fans in that stadium while I'm out here in my jersey and I black? Well, everyone in the stadium has one thing in common, a ticket.

They entered through the ticket gate, door, which is Jesus, a door that requires not purchasing qualification in this case, but rather putting down your own qualifications and trusting his.

It's grace. That's what makes you a participant in this kingdom. Kids, I want to talk especially to you for just a minute.

I know it can be really hard to listen to me for a long time. I get that. I've been there. But I want you to concentrate for a minute because this is God's word, so it's really important.

[22 : 50] Jesus wants you to know what it really means to be a Christian. Because it's confusing sometimes to us, isn't it? To really be a Christian, it doesn't mean going to church with your family, or even going to Sunday school every week, or even praying a lot, like when you eat and when you go to bed and other times.

Although those are good things, and those are things that Christians do, but that's not what makes you a Christian. Christian. What makes you a Christian is not anything good that you do.

It's something perfect that Jesus does. Does that difference make sense? You can't do enough good things. Jesus has done something perfect for you.

Jesus lived a perfect life, right? And then he died on the cross to forgive your sins. And he rose from the dead so that you can live like him.

And that's what it means to be a Christian. Not to do a lot of good things, but to trust the one who is really good and really perfect. That you trust him, that you believe in him.

[24 : 07] Rather than saying to yourself, I'm really good, you say, God, I want to be in your family, and I know that the only one good enough to be in your family is Jesus.

So I trust him. If you've never trusted Jesus, you don't have to wait. You can do that today, right now, and then come talk with your parents or with me after the service about that, or come to the communicants class if you want.

But listen, one last thing. Well, you can keep listening, but for now. If you think you're a good kid, you really need to trust Jesus and not you.

And if you think you're a bad kid, and you're not really good enough, you can trust Jesus too. And he loves you, and he forgives you, and you can all be a part of his family.

That's the good news of Jesus. That's what Jesus wants. Jesus wants to have us in his family. This is not a passage about how Jesus wants to keep people out.

[25 : 15] Look at the end of it, and this beautiful look we get at the heart of Jesus. Verse 31, at the very hour, some Pharisees came and said to him, get away from here, 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 course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.

Tell Herod, I'm not afraid of his threats because I'm already on my way to my death. I'm headed to Jerusalem to die, right?

And that prompts a thought for Jesus. Jerusalem. The city at the center of God's people, Israel. Verse 34, oh, Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones the ones who were 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.

[26 : 23] 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. There will come a time later when the Jews embrace the Messiah.

But as Jesus heads to the cross, he grieves for the people of God as he considers how many of them are actually rejecting God.

His heart is for associates and participants in God's kingdom, right? Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks.

You've been hanging around me, but I long to gather you into myself because it breaks my heart to see you left out. It's the heart of Jesus for those not actively trusting him.

It breaks his heart. In Matthew's gospel, when he says these words, we're told Jesus is weeping over Jerusalem. By the way, is that your heart?

[27 : 33] For those of you who know Jesus but know others who don't, is that your heart for them? Do you weep more than you scold?

Do you grieve out of love for them more than you lecture out of pride over them? Are you truly heartbroken for them or are you truly angry at them?

Whether they are Hindus in India, atheists in Ireland, nominal Presbyterians in Huntsville, do you truly long for them to be gathered to Jesus?

Jesus does. He wants them and me and you gathered to the one place of salvation.

It's a picture of safety and refuge and rest, isn't it? Get that picture in your head?

[28 : 38] It's the one Jesus gives us. It's one used warmly for God's loving protection throughout the Bible. But I've got to be honest with you, it's not such a cute, warm and fuzzy picture in this passage.

The context here is one of eternal danger. And Jesus' death, that's what he's talking about that he's going to Jerusalem for.

So when Jesus talks about gathering us under his wings like a hen, we've got to realize that the picture is a gruesome reality for the hen.

Hens gather their chicks under their wings when there's danger nearby. It could be a fox like Herod. Possibly freezing cold weather.

Maybe a fire in the barn. And the hen rushes to gather her chicks. While the hen could easily fly away from danger herself, she will stay and endure the pain.

[29 : 47] Even at times sacrificing her own life. To save the chicks who stay safe, protected beneath her wings.

That's the painful picture. But beautiful picture of our Savior who endures the pain of sin's curse on the cross.

That we might be safe. Protected under his wings. So of course he grieves when some of God's people are unwilling to be gathered to safety.

Are you willing to be gathered under Jesus' protection? I didn't ask, are you willing to play church to make your spouse happy?

Or would you rather be associated with Christians than any other religion? Christian? My heart for all of you, I think most of you know I love you a lot.

[30 : 51] And for all of you who are here and spend any time with us, my heart, I want you to be in with me. Now and in this life, but especially forever.

That we would together know that kind of refuge of safety and joy, resting with Jesus and serving and enjoying him forever.

And there's only one way in. To experience the grace of God. To despair of your own qualifications and actively embrace Jesus.

To run under the loving wings of Jesus for refuge and rest. That's why I'm always talking to you about Jesus. Jesus. Because he's the only one.

The only way that we find a true relationship with God. True participation in his kingdom. Listen, if you're just here to make someone else happy.

[31 : 51] Just to get your kids some good morals. Just to hang out with some nice friends. As Derek said earlier, I'm really glad you're here.

I'm not trying to run you off at all. But I want to love you enough to offer you the only hope that any of us has.

To plead with you to receive the forgiveness and freedom and joy of Jesus. He wants to gather you in under his wings.

How tragic it would be to have spent so much time around the things of God and the people of God and then to spend eternity apart from him.

I want so much more than that for you. Don't be deceived by good feelings of association. Don't assume the door remains open forever.

[32 : 50] Don't conclude that it is no big deal where you stand. Jesus longs to gather all people in. Come to him. Trust him.

Today. Let's pray. Jesus, we hear that in your voice even as it was sung over us earlier.

How often I've longed to gather you beneath my gentle wings. Jesus, you longed to do that so much that you gave your life for us.

that you covered us even as the blows of the cross and the nails pierced you.

You stayed because you love us. And so you call us into that relationship and Jesus, as you call young people and older people and people who've never been to church and people who've never missed a Sunday to yourself.

[33 : 55] Would we hear your voice and come and find rest and refuge? Do your work, Holy Spirit, in our hearts for the glory of Jesus and for our eternal good.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Good morning,■■■■■, sigue ourzla. Good morning, good morning, Vicente, and again. Thank you, as well. Good morning, all right.

Good morning, good morning, and later. Good morning, bye baby. Good morning, good morning, good morning, heard about the Jean, lossy guys and challenges, takish, you can see good morning, and I hope all for you for youriliary Um, thank you, and I hope have the How the club and assessment for you.