

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #22 "Will the Saved be Few?" "Will the Saved Include You?"

Scripture Luke 13:22-30

Scripture indicates that Jesus was constantly teaching. He taught in synagogues, along seashores, in fishing boats, on the pathways between towns and villages. Wherever He was, He was surrounded by people — some were curious spectators, some were critics, some were disciples. Sometimes there were thousands of people in His presence and sometimes it was just Jesus with His twelve companions. Whatever the context, He was teaching about the kingdom of God.

All the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) describe interactions between Jesus and the people He encountered. He healed, cast out demons, raised the dead, fed thousands of people — such a wide variety of supernatural actions. Every occasion when people were with Jesus was His opportunity to demonstrate the power of God and explain the truth about God's kingdom and to point listeners toward a relationship with God.

We can assume that many people had questions about Jesus' teachings. The Twelve Apostles asked questions when they did not understand parables. The religious leaders asked Jesus many questions, not because they wanted to learn from Him, but because they wanted to catch Him in some matter that would give them grounds for discrediting Him. Some of the questions asked by individuals were frivolous, and Jesus refused to respond to these, but occasionally a question became the basis for important teaching. Such is the case with the passage for today

Read Luke 13:22-30

It is impossible for us to know if the question in verse 23 was a sincere question asked by a genuine follower or whether it was designed to trap Jesus in words which would subject Him to criticism. Perhaps the questioner had observed that only a few individuals out of the multitudes were genuinely loyal to Him. Perhaps the questioner was a legalist who thought that the only people who would be in heaven were those who carefully kept the Law of Moses.

Most Jews thought that only those who were of Israelite descent and who faithfully followed the laws of Moses were qualified for God's salvation. The Pharisees, in particular, bragged about being the descendents of Abraham, God's special chosen people, and they assumed that they would be first in line to enter heaven because of their zeal in keeping the Law.

In His response to the question, Jesus did not give a simple direct answer. Instead, His answer was in the form of a parable, a form of teaching He used frequently. Parables were simple stories or illustrations which had deep meanings. Instead of a short general answer, Jesus personalized His response. The subject of the opening statement is implied, but what he said was, "You must make every effort to be saved." The "you" is plural because Jesus was speaking to a group.

There is enough information in the verses for us to figure out the deeper meaning of the passage. The setting of the parable is a banquet. From verse 26 we learn that Jesus Himself is the "Owner" because He was the One who ate and drank and taught the people. Verse 29 informs us that the "house" represents the "kingdom of God." The only way to enter the house/kingdom where the banquet was to be held is described as a "narrow door."

Those are the essential facts. There is one inference we can make from the parable. The banquet to which Jesus was referring would be at the end of the age when there would be no more opportunities to become a believer in Jesus Christ. Jesus emphasized the urgency of getting inside the door while there was opportunity, because, at some point in time, the door would be closed, after which it would be impossible for a person to enter.

Jesus acknowledged that many people wanted to attend the banquet. In fact, many of them even expected to be able to attend and they were surprised to find themselves locked out. For the people who would be excluded from the house/kingdom, "there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verse 28).

In the first part of His answer, Jesus implied that entrance into the house / kingdom would not be easy, but entering was important enough that an individual should "make every effort" to get inside. The verb used in verse 24 indicates that an "all-out" effort was appropriate. It was Jesus' opinion that the objective of entering God's kingdom should be the highest priority in a person's life.

The Apostle Paul used this same verb when describing the all out efforts of an athlete in training (*1 Corinthians 9:25*). The serious athlete pushes himself to his limit of pain and endurance. He does everything he can to win the competition and claim the prize. Jesus wanted all His listeners to understand that nothing in this life can be compared to the value and benefit and blessing of life in God's eternal kingdom, and that an individual's determination to find the door and go through it into the kingdom was the wisest, best action that a person could ever take.

Back in chapter 9 we thought about some verses which apply here. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" and then He explained the reason to do this: "What good is it," He asked, "for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self (soul)?" (*Luke 9:23, 25*). In other words, while in this life, the purpose and motivation and emphasis of a person must be on eternity in God's kingdom.

Jesus was not implying that people must work to obtain their salvation. Scripture makes it clear that the only basis of salvation is the sacrificial death of Jesus, and that redemption has been made available to humanity only through the initiative and grace of God. The Pharisees mistakenly thought that they were qualified for heaven because they kept the Law. They sought to be righteous through their work activities.

Many, many churchgoers today have a similar attitude. They assume that they will enter heaven because of the merits they build up through their good works. They assume that God is loving and that He will accept all those who sincerely try to do their best. These assumptions are not based on information in the Bible. When Jesus said, "Make every effort to enter," He was not giving instructions about how to enter heaven through personal efforts.

So what did Jesus mean when He implied that an "all out effort was necessary in order to enter through the narrow door?" He was talking about the discipline and perseverance necessary in the life of a believer. He was talking about lifestyle between the moment of belief and the time of death. People can do nothing to gain salvation, but the proof of salvation is in the lifestyle of the believer. Believers who choose to follow the ways of God will face hostility. Life will not be easy for them. The Bible describes how the faithful believer will face opposition from "the world, the devil, and the sinful flesh." That's a little formula describing what believers are up against. It is not easy for the followers of Jesus to stand firm in their faith against these evil forces.

Consider “the world.” Ungodly values permeate the cultures, religions, and nations of the world. There is a world system which influences and controls the thinking and activities of people. The world has a way of appealing to the followers of Jesus, drawing them away from their relationship with Jesus and obedience to the truths of God word into conformity to the desires, habits, and customs of the people who live around them. The world emphasizes individualism, secularism, humanism, materialism, hedonism, existentialism, relativism, scientism, and other “isms,” none of which are in harmony with the ways of God.

The devil uses temptations to get believers to disobey God and do sinful actions. He creates doubts in order to get believers to lose their confidence and soften their beliefs. He uses worries and anxieties to turn the thoughts of believers onto themselves and away from God. He places images in the minds of believers to get them to fantasize about physical pleasures. He appeals to the pride of people, and to their selfish desires for greater personal comforts and for personal power, position, and possessions. None of these selfish desires are appropriate for the disciple who is supposed to deny himself and seek the kingdom of God.

All believers have a sin nature. In Scripture this nature is called “the flesh.” Even after a person becomes a believer in Jesus, and receives the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God, he/she must deal with a mixture of old habits, thoughts, and desires alongside the new life of the Spirit. Natural instincts, which all of us have because of our physical attributes, remain the same for believers and non-believers, but for the believer these instincts can and must be controlled. This matter of control over the sinful flesh, the works of the devil, and the influences of the world is the area where spiritual conflict occurs.

The person who chooses to live righteously in the world, that is, who chooses to live according to the standards of God, is subject to the hostility of the non-believers of the world, the devil, and the flesh. Believers live in the world, but they must not be part of the world. The writer James, in his letter near the end of the New Testament, wrote, “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes and enemy of God” (*James 4:4*).

The apostle John in his short letter wrote, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (*1 John 2:15-17*).

In spite of the hatred and pressures put upon them, believers must be countercultural in their attitudes and in choices and lifestyles if they are to please God. Love for God and love for this world are mutually exclusive. Believers must “make every effort” to be qualified to enter the narrow door. They must live “against the grain” of the world around them. They must live according to kingdom rules during their years here on earth. The Christian life is not always an easy life, but Jesus assures us that the efforts of believers to live holy and righteous lives here on earth will lead to the benefits of heaven. The rewards inside the kingdom of God are well worth the discipline, hardships, ridicule, and persecutions that are endured here on earth.

The text in the first part of verse 24 is the encouragement part of this message. All the remaining verses are a warning. There will come a time when the opportunity to enter the kingdom and join the banquet will come to an end, when the Owner of the house will close the door. On that day there will be many on the outside who will seek entrance, but it will be denied to them even though they knock and plead for the door to be opened. The basis of their refusal is the Owner’s declaration that He did not know them. You would act the same way: If a person knocked on your door, you wouldn’t invite them in unless you knew them, right?

This action of the Owner was perplexing to those who appealed for entry. Their appeal was based on the fact that they had been with Him at meal times and had listened to His teaching in the streets. From their standpoint, their social contact, their casual association with Jesus, was enough to qualify them to be in the kingdom.

In reality, what people think they know about Jesus is not important. What really counts is how well the Owner knows the people. Notice the passage carefully. The reason the Owner refused to open the door was stated two times, "I don't know you, I don't know where you come from." Most of the Scripture verses which use the verb "know" use it in the sense of people coming to know God. However, there are several outstanding verses which refer to God knowing us and accepting us. For example, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep," and He said a second time, "I know them ... I give them eternal life ... No one can snatch them out of my hand" (*John 10:14, 27*). The basis of eternal security is to be known by Jesus.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, 'The Lord knows those who are his'" (*II Timothy 2:19*). Again, the basis of security is to be known by God. Who are the people known by God? God acknowledges His people by giving them His Holy Spirit. In his letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul wrote these words, "Having believed, you were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (*Ephesians 1:13-14*). The indwelling Holy Spirit is God's seal of ownership.

The people who are recognized, accepted, and known by God are those to whom He has given the Holy Spirit. Those who are locked out of the kingdom are those who don't belong to Him. He doesn't know them. They aren't His property. They are declared to be "evildoers," and God wants nothing to do with them.

Jesus described what the conditions outside the kingdom would be like. There would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We need to put verse 28 into its proper context to understand the impact of what Jesus was teaching in this passage. Those listening to Jesus were Jews. Some of them were undoubtedly Pharisees. As the chosen people of God, they assumed that they had access to the kingdom by virtue of their heritage and participation in the religious ceremonies.

Jesus was trying to make clear to them that their backgrounds and traditions and ritualistic activities were not enough to qualify them to be in God's kingdom. He said that they would be shocked and dismayed when they recognized that their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets would be in the kingdom and that they were excluded.

Jesus did not allude to this fact, but all the forefathers and prophets understood the covenant promises of God and, by faith, were looking forward to their Messiah/Redeemer. Jesus, in contrast, was daily facing opposition and rejection by the very people who should have been enthusiastically committing their lives to Him, like the forefathers and prophets did. The Jews who were with Jesus were not of the same mind as the Old Testament saints.

The final two statements by Jesus would have added anger to the dismay of His listeners. He said that people from all over the world would be present at the feast in the kingdom. This is a reference to gentiles. In Jewish thinking, gentiles were excluded from the promises and covenants of God. The Jews were convinced that no gentile would ever be advanced ahead of any Jew. Yet Jesus was stating that many gentiles would be accepted by God while many Jews would be treated as evildoers. I can just imagine the blood of the Jewish listeners beginning to boil in anger at these words.

Jesus answered the original question by describing that many people would be in the kingdom of God, but that most of them would not be Israelites. Verse 30 sums up the teaching. Those who are last, the gentiles, would be advanced to the table, and those who assumed that they would be welcomed because of their heritage and their own self-righteous efforts would be excluded. Jesus completely overturned the expectations of His Jewish listeners. In the context of the passage, Jesus was warning these listeners that they would be excluded from God's spiritual blessings if they did not approach God in a different, more appropriate way. That is the key point of this teaching episode.

Many people today believe that there are a variety of ways to God — that the road to heaven is like the highway system with many possible routes. Jesus however, insisted that there is only one possible way, through a narrow door. I'm sure you are aware that Jesus, in other places in Scripture, presented Himself as the "door" or "gateway" into heaven. Let me close with two quotations. "Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through me will be saved'" (*John 10:7,9*), and, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (*John 14:6*).

This passage began with the question, "Will the saved by few?" I leave you with the question, "Will the saved include you?"