**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**KINGDOM ENTRY**

**Luke 13:22-35**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we continue looking at Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God in Luke 13. A few weeks ago, Jesus taught us that the Kingdom of God – the manifested rule and reign of God himself – is both here and on its way. It is both now and not yet. The seed of the Kingdom has been planted in our world, and it will continue growing steadily until it has completely transformed reality. Until that day, all who have put their trust in Christ wait eagerly and work faithfully until our King returns in the fullness of his Kingdom.

When will that be? Luke records the Pharisees asking this precise question in Luke 17 as well as Jesus’ response. This is what Luke wrote in verses 20-21:

“Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.’”

The Kingdom of God may not be seen, but it is in the midst of us, and it confronts us with this crucial, life and death question: are you a part of God’s Kingdom? Or to put it another way, are you a citizen of God’s Kingdom?

Citizenship is something that most of us take for granted. Most of us, including myself, were born in Canada and have never had to consider what life would have been like if we weren’t citizens. But did you know that citizenship confers amazing privileges? For example, if you’re a citizen, you can never be forced to leave the country. You have a constitutional right to live in Canada that can’t be taken away. Not everyone enjoys this privilege. You can live here all your life, speak the language, know the culture, and yet still be deported if you’ve never become a citizen.

So if citizenship is so important in this lifetime, how much more in the life to come? After all, as precious as Canadian citizenship may be, it won’t last forever. History teaches us that nations don’t last. Even mighty empires like Rome and Greece came toppling down with time. One day, there will be a world where there is no Canada, no America, no Russia, no China. But the Kingdom of God is different. It will never topple. There will never be a time in the history of creation when there is no Kingdom of God, because it is an *eternal* Kingdom ruled by an *eternal* King filled with *eternal* citizens. This is why Hebrews 12:28 says,

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken…”

In our text today, the King himself is going to ask us whether we are citizens of his kingdom. If you don’t think so, do you want to be? And if you do think so, are you sure? This is not a question that we can answer lightly, nor should we, because our eternal destiny hangs in the balance.

The title of this message is **Kingdom Entry**. My aim today is to show you **Entering the Kingdom Takes Hard Work.**

The outline of this sermon is as follows:

1. The King’s Warning
2. The King’s Judgment
3. The King’s Lament

(1) **THE KING’S WARNING**

Our text today begins in verse 22: “He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.” Luke is reminding us that Jesus, although making stops here and there to teach, is continuing his inevitable journey towards Jerusalem. Reaching Jerusalem is his ultimate goal, because only there would he fulfill his ultimate mission, not of being crowned as a king, but of being crucified as a criminal.

The cross is Jesus’ mission. Jesus knows it, and Luke wants us to know it as well. He wants us to know that Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem, so that we would see that the cross wasn’t the failure of God’s plans of redemption through Christ. It was their fulfillment.

On the way to Jerusalem, however, someone asks Jesus a very interesting question in verse 23: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” At the time, it was a common belief among the Jewish people that all the Jews would be saved on the day of God’s Judgment by virtue of their ethnicity.

Jesus taught otherwise. Over and over again, he taught that the universal salvation of the Jews was not true. For example:

* He told the parable of the sower and the seeds to show that many who heard the Word of God and even seemed to believe it would fail to be saved.
* He warned the inhabitants of multiple Jewish cities that they would be judged because they did not repent after seeing Jesus’ miracles.
* When the Jewish lawyer asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus didn’t say, “Just trust in your Jewish ancestry.” He said, “You need to be like the Good Samaritan, who lovingly gave of himself to care for his enemy.”
* And when the Jews asked him about the tragic murder of a group of Galileans by Pilate, Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Jesus couldn’t have been clearer: salvation isn’t universal, not even for the Jewish people. If you want to be saved, your ancestry won’t cut it. Salvation is based solely and exclusively on whether you repented of your sins and put your faith in Christ.

Therefore, it was quite natural for people who followed Jesus’ ministry to ask the question in verse 23: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” If not everyone is going to be saved, then how many will it be?

Perhaps you’ve wondered the same thing. Perhaps you’ve had a friend or a family member grow up as a professing believer but is no longer walking with God. It may have been someone you looked up to or even someone you mentored. Whoever it may be, when you think about these people who started strong but failed to finish, who abandoned the Lord they said they’d never leave, perhaps you want to ask Jesus the same question: “Lord, keeping the faith seems so hard. How many will make it to the end? Will those who are saved be few?”

As we have often seen, Jesus chooses not to answer the question directly, because the question itself is problematic. For Jesus to answer the question directly is to grant that it is for us to know how many people will be saved, but it’s not. There are some things in God’s mysterious providence that aren’t meant for us to know, including the number of those who will be saved. We are not to be concerned with whether the saved will be few or many, but we *are* to be concerned with our *own* salvation. Jesus’ reply to the question in verse 24 is, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Don’t ask whether others will be saved. Ask whether *you* will be saved.” There’s an old song that goes, “Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.” Verse 24 is like that, except it’s “Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to take the way to get there.”

It seems to be a simple thing, doesn’t it, to walk through a door? Jesus says that’s all people have to do to be saved. Just walk through a door and you’re safe in God’s Kingdom, sheltered from the wrath of God’s justice against our sin.

It seems simple, but it’s not, *because we don’t want to walk through the door*. Our sin leads us to rebel against God, and against God’s will. If he says walk, we run. If he says crawl, we jump. Our sin leads us to want the opposite of what God wants. So if he says walk through the narrow door, we won’t do it. The fact that we want to get into the Kingdom doesn’t matter. We’d rather make our own way and stubbornly believe that, with just enough effort, we’ll eventually find another way.

But there is no other way. The door is narrow, Jesus says, and many will seek to enter and will not be able. And one day, the master of the house will rise and shut the door, and anyone who failed to enter through the narrow door will never find their way in.

This door that lies open before us is Christ. All that he is, and all that he did for us in his perfect life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection opened the way for us to enter into God’s Kingdom. His death atoned for our sins, so that we could be counted righteous before God, and his resurrection gave us new life, so that we could live as God’s very children. Christ is the door, and to walk through that door is to repent of our sins and believe the good news of the gospel. It’s simple, but that doesn’t mean it’s easy.

So what are we to do? How are we to be saved? How do we get through that narrow door, so that we’re not one of these who want to get in but never do?

The typical evangelical answer to this question is, “Stop trying so hard. Let go and let God. Ease your way into the Kingdom.” That’s not what Jesus says. Jesus says, “Strive!” “Work as hard as you can!” “Use all your willpower and strength to get through that narrow door.” The word for “strive” here is the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 9:25 where he says the Christian life is like that of an elite athlete training and competing in the games. Athletes strive to become the best at their sport. They discipline themselves. They work their hardest. They use all their effort day in and day out to win the ultimate prize. Jesus is saying that, if we are to enter the narrow door, then we must live like this.

Don’t misunderstand. Jesus isn’t saying that we earn our way into God’s Kingdom. There’s a life and death difference between earning heaven by working hard and entering heaven by working hard. To believe that you earn heaven by working hard is to believe that you need to make a way into the Kingdom. It’s to believe that you need to make the door yourself. If you believe that, you’ll never get in.

We don’t need to make the door. *The door is already opened*. Yes, it takes hard work to get in, but that’s not the same as saying the hard work is the reason why we get in.

Jesus is telling us to strive because the two things we need to enter the door – repentance from sin and faith in Christ – need to be *fought for*. Killing sin and trusting Christ aren’t cakewalks. There’s nothing harder than putting off our sin and putting on Christ. But if we are to enter God’s Kingdom, these are the things we must fight for.

But the good news is that, for those who trust in Christ, God will supply the strength that you need to fight for repentance and faith. You don’t have to do it alone. God provides what he commands. He has opened the door for us *through* Christ, and he will enable us to walk through that door as we abide *in* Christ.

(2) **THE KING’S JUDGMENT**

But now you may be wondering, is all this worth it? Why should I strive to enter the narrow door? What’s so bad about being left outside anyways? Can’t we just find another kingdom somewhere other than God’s Kingdom and live happily ever after? No. There is no other kingdom. All that’s left outside of God’s Kingdom is eternal sadness and torment. This leads to our next point: The King’s Judgment.

Jesus continues our text with a tragically sad picture of judgment in verse 25: “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.’”

These people who wandered around looking for any other way into the Kingdom suddenly find themselves locked out. The door that was opened to them for so long has been shut, and they are terrified. They are so terrified that immediately they approach the door and start banging, shouting, “Lord, open the door! Please, we beg you, we weren’t ready to enter the narrow door but we are now. Please, let us in!”

But the master of the house won’t let them in. “I do not know where you come from”, he says. “How can that be?” they ask. “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets. Of course you know us”. But the master simply repeats what he told them already: “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil.”

Here in these verses, Jesus reveals a key element of this parable. He reveals that the master of the house who rises and shuts the door is none other than himself. Jesus is the King of the Kingdom. He is the one who ate and drank in their presence, and he is the one who taught in their streets. And one day, he will be the one who shuts the gates of God’s Kingdom forever.

And what will it be like outside? Jesus doesn’t tell us much, but he tells us enough in verse 28: “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The only things people will experience outside the Kingdom are grief, anger, and regret. They will weep with deepest sorrow and grind their teeth in bitter anger as they spend an eternity wondering, “Why didn’t we enter when we had the chance? Why didn’t we just walk through that narrow door? Why did we wait until it was too late?” Day after day, year after year, century after century without end, they will weep and cry out in anger because they didn’t walk through the door when they had the chance.

And what is it that they are weeping about? Jesus tells us in verse 28 that, for the Jews, their torment would come from seeing their forefathers in God’s Kingdom without them. We see that in verse 28, where Jesus says “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*.*”For the Jews, their ethnic identity was at the center of who they were. It defined them. They didn’t know who they were without their historical and ethnic connection to the Jewish Patriarchs. So for them, there was no greater torment than to see the Jewish Patriarchs, the founders of their people, in God’s Kingdom without them.

What’s worse, Jesus says in verse 29, “And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.” Jesus is telling his Jewish audience that Gentiles would be in the kingdom. This would have been revolting to the Jews. Gentiles within the Kingdom, and Jews without? How could that be? The Kingdom belonged to the Jews, didn’t it? Jesus says no, it doesn’t. The Kingdom belongs to all who walk through the narrow door that is Christ, whether they be Jew or Gentile.

Gentiles like us who are living in the 21st century may have a hard time relating to this, but the principle, which is found in verse 30, remains true: “Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” One commentator puts it this way:

“[M]any who expect to enter God’s kingdom will be excluded, while outsiders who had expected to be excluded will be included.”

Where do you find your identity? What characteristic or trait of yours are you most proud of, and that you think will gain you entry into the Kingdom? Whatever it is, it’s going to be the source of your greatest torment if you remain outside the Kingdom when the door is shut. For the Jews, it was their ethnicity, but for you it may be something else.

Do you think that your good works will earn your way into heaven? Then one day you’ll suffer the anguish of seeing broken people, criminals even, in God’s Kingdom but you yourself left outside. Or do you think you’re going to heaven because you’re more successful than other people? Then one day, you’ll be in torment over the fact that heaven is filled by people who were *nobodys* in this world. The poor, the blue-collar workers, the highschool dropouts, the homeless – these are the kinds of people God calls into his Kingdom. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29:

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

This is the King’s Judgment on those who refuse to enter through the narrow door. It is an eternal hell of torment, anguish, and regret. Our sins must be paid for, whether by Christ on the cross, or by ourselves on the day when the narrow door is shut.

(3) **THE KING’S LAMENT**

Our text ends with a moving narrative showing us Jesus’ heart. He may be the Judge, but he finds no delight in judging. He is a merciful judge, and his desire is for all people to be saved. But they won’t be, and this leads to our third point: the King’s Lament.

Verse 31 opens with some Pharisees warning Jesus of imminent danger from Herod, the political ruler of that region. The Pharisees were generally antagonistic towards Jesus, but not these ones. They seem to genuinely care about Jesus’ welfare and want to keep him from harm by warning him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” If someone threatened to kill you, you’d respond in one of two ways. Fight or flight. You’d either run away or fight back. But I’m guessing that, if the most powerful person in the region made the threat, chances are that you would get out of there as fast as you could.

But Jesus wasn’t intimidated by worldly power, because his power far surpassed it all. When he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and his disciples started to retaliate, Jesus stopped them and said,

“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”

Jesus could have fled, or he could have fought, but he did neither. Instead, he continued steadily on his course towards Jerusalem. Why? Because of verses 32-33, where Jesus says, “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.’”

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, because he knew that was his Father’s will for him to die there. And if that was the case, then he knew that *nothing* could harm him before then, not even Herod. Jesus had to cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day (which was a subtle reference to his resurrection), Jesus would finish his course. This is what Jesus came to do. He came to suffer, die, and rise, and nothing could stop that from happening. And so, Jesus continued steadily along in complete confidence in the sovereign will of his father.

But as he sets his face towards Jerusalem once again, Jesus is filled with grief at the sins of Israel and cries out with this lament in verses 34-35: “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 were not willing! 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!’”

What a striking picture. Jesus likens himself to a mother hen sheltering her chicks under her wings and leading them to safety. That’s Jesus’ heart towards the lost. As sinful as they may be, Jesus never loses his compassion for them. They may have killed the prophets, and they would eventually kill him, but Jesus never hardens his heart against them. He longs for them, and he desires for them to be with him. His heart is so full of compassion for them that even on the cross, he would cry out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Jesus may be the Judge, but he finds no delight in judging. Jesus longs for every person still outside the Kingdom to come to him before the narrow door is shut. Jesus’ heart is none other than God’s own heart. Ezekiel 33:11 says:

“As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

Even in the midst of all this warning and talk about judgment and hell, there is love. Jesus tells us to strive to enter the narrow door with the strength that he supplies because he *loves* us. He wants us in his Kingdom. He doesn’t want us left outside. So will you strive to enter the narrow door, or will you search in vain for another way until it’s too late?

**CONCLUSION**

Now there are three possible ways that you’re responding to a sermon like this. The first is that you believe what Jesus is saying here and you’re absolutely terrified. You read this description of hell in verse 28 as a place of unending weeping and gnashing of teeth, and you’re thinking, “I never want to end up there.” The good news is that you don’t have to. Enter the Kingdom through the narrow door that is Christ, and you never have to fear God’s judgment. Today, you can put your trust in Christ. Believe the gospel, give your life to Christ, and be saved.

The second way you may be responding right now is with skepticism. You don’t believe what Jesus is saying here. He may as well be describing unicorns in the sky. It makes no difference to you. But let me ask you a question: what if he’s right? Are you willing to take that chance? The Bible teaches that your eternal destiny rests on what you believe about Christ. Will you not at least dig a little deeper into the questions of who Jesus was and what he came to do? There are credible reasons for believing that Jesus is the risen Son of God, and that everything he said was true, but if you never inquire, then you’ll never know, and one day, you will regret that decision forever.

The last way you may be responding right now is with comfort. You believe what Jesus is saying and you’re thinking, “I’m good! Thanks again for the warning Jesus.” It’s not a bad thing to rest comfortably in Christ. The assurance of your salvation is a work of the Spirit and a gift from God. There are days when you need to fill assured, and should feel assured, but *that day is not today*. God’s intention in our text today is to *challenge* us, not *comfort* us. He wants us to renew our efforts to *strive* to enter the narrow door because of the threat of judgment.

Jesus couldn’t be clearer in saying that there are people who think that they’re saved who aren’t. These people in verse 26 ate and drank with Jesus and listened to his teaching. They had a relationship with him. Their problem, however, is that they didn’t have the right *kind* of relationship. They knew Jesus, spoke with Jesus, and listened to Jesus, but they never belonged to Jesus. They never gave their lives to him. They didn’t strive to enter the narrow door. And because of this, when the narrow door is shut, Jesus will say, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil.”

May those dreadful words never be spoken about anyone here. May those who think they know Christ *actually* know him as Lord and Saviour, and show this by truly *striving* to enter the narrow door, so that when the door is shut, all of us will be found in God’s Kingdom and not left without.

1 Corinthians 10:12 says,

“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

We know that all who are truly saved are saved to the uttermost. Nothing can take away our salvation. But until that day when we stand before God’s seat of judgment and are declared innocent because of Christ, we must *take heed*. We must *strive* with all our might to enter the Kingdom of God, and by the grace of God, we *will* enter and rejoice in God’s presence forever.