

Luke Chapter 13 v 22 - 30

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[0 : 00] the new year. Last week we looked at verses 18 through the 21 and we're going to read from verse 18 and through into verse 30. So Luke chapter 13, if you have one of the red church Bibles, that's page 1046. Reading from verse 18.

Then Jesus asked, what is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree and the birds perched in its branches. Again he asked, what shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It's like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 30 kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? He said to them, make every effort to enter through the narrow door. Because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to do so.

Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, sir, open the door for us. But he will answer, I don't know you or where you come from. Then you will say, we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets. But he will reply, I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers. There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God. But you yourselves thrown out.

[2 : 01] People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who will be last. Sorry. Indeed, there are those who are last, who will be first, and those and first who will be last. I read just a few moments ago, particularly those verses 22 through to 30. I wonder when was the last time you actually ran. And if you can remember how far back that was. I mean, not just sort of a gentle sort of a jog even, but ran, sprinted even.

Perhaps it may have been as far back as sports day when you were at primary school. I'm not sure, but perhaps some of you may have been involved in sports and athletics and all sorts of things too. But even if it's been a long, long time since we were involved in some sort of a race or running, we can appreciate just how amazing it is in one sense for men and women to compete in sports like the Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games and so on. And of course, when you watch those sporting events, you're aware that these people haven't just sort of walked off the street and decided they're going to run one day.

They've spent years and years every day training their bodies with serious dieting and sacrificing their time and energies just to make it there to the beginning of that 100 meters, 200 meters or whatever. But even when they've gone through all that training, even when they've gone to all those lengths of sacrifice and diet and so on and so forth, there's still something that they all must have. That's not enough for them to win the race. They must have something else. They must have that single-minded determination to get to the finish first. And when you watch a race like that, they're sort of getting themselves into that mindset, but you only really get a glimpse of what really is going on when you get to see the finishing line and the race rerun in slow motion.

And you see them, and you see as they approach the line, that their faces, their bodies are all straining for the line. Every fiber of their being, their thinking, and their bodies, they are pushing themselves as hard as they possibly can in every way at all cost to get to that line first.

And even though some of them have just been running even less than 10 seconds, you see at the end, they're exhausted. They've given their all at their bodies and their minds. They may even fall to the ground or sit down on the ground. They have given everything for the hope of gaining a medal.

[4 : 53] Now when Jesus speaks in response to this question, he has in mind the very same thing that I'm talking about when he says, make every effort. In the original Greek, it's just one word, but

for us, it has to be three to try and get across this sense of straining every muscle. Push yourself to the limit. Do whatever it takes, no matter what the cost, to get across the line.

It's a forceful command from Jesus in reply to a question raised by someone in the crowd. Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? His response is, make every effort, strain every fiber of your being to enter through the narrow door. No doubt this question that the man raises is connected to what Jesus has been teaching and preaching. We're told he's gone through the towns and the villages. He's making his way to Jerusalem for the last time. We saw earlier on in Luke that he's set his face. He's determined himself to go to the cross to suffer for the salvation of his people.

And no doubt, as he's been teaching, he's been preaching very much the same message he's been preaching all the way through, concerning the importance of being saved. Back even in chapter three, when he spoke to the people, he says to them, I tell you, unless you repent, you too will all perish. He says that twice. Perishing, unless you repent. And earlier on in chapter nine, verse 43, in one of his other sermons, he talks about the importance again. Sorry, 9 verse 24, beg your pardon, of Luke. He says to the people there, whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. So the message of salvation is the message Jesus is talking about and speaking about. And this man says, well, Lord, if there's salvation, will many people be saved? Or as he put it, will only a few people going to be saved?

Was it a genuine question? Was it something that came out of his own heart asking, Lord, will I be saved? Was it maybe just an idle curiosity that brings him to ask that question?

Whatever the motive for the question, which we don't know, Jesus' reply moves beyond a simple yes or no response? It launches him into this call, this cry, as it were, this declaration, make every effort, do all that you can, strain every ligament to get through the narrow door.

[7 : 56] But what's through the narrow door that's so urgent? What's through the narrow door that demands that we make every effort to get in it and through it? What is it that there lies beyond this door that is so worth? When you think about it, those athletes that I thought about and spoke about, they're doing it for a medal or gold, for prestige, for honor, for a sense of being declared around the world as the Olympic champion or the world champion or whatever it may be. There's a certain amount of honor and so on and so forth. But what's through this door? What is it that we are to strain and to stretch our muscles for? What is it that we are to do everything and put everything aside for the sake of? It's that we might enter the kingdom of God. We know that, of course, because of what Jesus has been talking about just in the verses before. He's talked about the kingdom of God. And of course, when he tells us what we, what is inside later on in these verses, verse 28, all the prophets in the kingdom of God. Verse 29, people from the north, south, east, and west take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Through that door is the kingdom of God. We thought about that just a bit last

Sunday, particularly when we looked at these parables of Jesus. The kingdom of God is that place in which God rules as the king of our lives, that place in which we know his protection. We're brought under his care. Ultimately, simply, it means to be a Christian. To be in the kingdom of God is to be a Christian. That's how Paul describes it when he writes to the Christians at Colossus in his letter to the Colossians. He talks about giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. That's something that's happened already for every Christian.

They are in the kingdom of God. So why does Jesus urge? Why does Jesus say it's necessary to enter through this narrow door into the kingdom of God? Why is it so important to do everything possible to make sure that we have entered the kingdom of God? Well, simply for the reason that not everyone will enter the kingdom of God. In one sense, Jesus does answer this man's question. Lord, are only a few to be saved? Jesus says this, many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. There'll be many who will never enter the kingdom of God. There's no automatic entrance, as it were. It's not as if they're like the automatic doors at the supermarket, wherever it is, that just open for you. It's not as if that every single person who's ever lived or ever born is automatically going to be brought into the kingdom of God.

And as we thought last week, this kingdom of God that we are part of now if we're Christians is something that finds its fulfillment, finds its completion in the kingdom of heaven, in that place in which God dwells for eternity, that place which is beyond this world. And for some people, for many people in fact, particularly people in our own country, I would say, and in the West, there's this

almost sense in which automatically I'm going to be in heaven. We talk about it in so many different ways when somebody has died. We talk about them being in a better place. We talk about them going to be with the Lord. We talk about them in so many different ways. It's almost expected, whoever they are.

But that would be wrong. But that's wrong. Because Jesus makes it very clear. Many will try to enter and will not be able to. Why? Why can't everybody enter the kingdom of God? Why won't everyone be in heaven with God? Well, because not everyone will be there in time, if I can put it that way. Because some people will be too late. That's the reason. It's not that God has put a barrier in that sense between the kingdom of God and the people of this world. It's not that God has barred the way and said, look, you just can't get through. I'm just not going to let anybody in. It's not that this narrow door is just can't be found. It's there and declared in the gospel. It's not that it's kept a secret from us. It's just that at this time, many people don't want to go into the kingdom of God. Many people don't care whether they're in the kingdom of God or not. All of us live according to time. Even if you're retired, you still have to live according to time. Time controls our lives. We can't just buy from the supermarket whenever we like. We can only go when there are certain times that the supermarket is open. Other times it will be shut. If we want to see the doctor, we have to make an appointment and be there on time or else our place will be given to somebody else or to see the bank manager.

[13:18] And for those of you boys and girls who go to school, it's important that you're there on time. Time is something we live by. We are managed by. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise us that time is the most precious possession that we have. Time is something that we can never get more of, but we are losing every second. And we don't know any of us how much time we've got left.

There's no clock counting down the time of your life or mine. There's no calendar saying so many days or hours until such and such. This present time, in fact, this present moment is all that we're guaranteed. And Jesus tells us that there is a time when it will be too late to enter the kingdom of God. There's a time when we will put off stretching and straining to get into the kingdom of God and it will be too late. And it's sadly only then that people will realize that they are on the outside and only then that they'll long to get in. But God has said this, today is the day of salvation.

Now is the time of God's favor. That's why Jesus says so strenuously, make every effort, do what you can now to get into the kingdom of God. Don't put it off because there will come a day when ultimately, no matter how hard you try, you won't be able to get in.

You can now, but there will come a day when you can't. Notice what he says, once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door. The door is open this narrow way. The door is open into the kingdom of God for every single person who is alive today. But one day it will be closed. And in one sense, there's two ways in which this door will be closed. First of all, it will be closed when Jesus comes again. That's really what Jesus is talking about here. That's really the chief meaning of what he's getting at here. The world as we know it will reach its ultimate conclusion. And at that moment, when time ceases, the door will be shut. The God who is the owner of this world will get up, if we want to sense, and close the door to his kingdom. However, for all of those who heard Jesus then, and for the vast majority, if not all of us even here today, there is another time when the door will be closed even before Christ returns. The door will be closed when we die.

That way into the kingdom of God is open to you while you're alive, while you have breath, while you have opportunity. But the moment that you die, the moment that you pass from this life into the next world, that door is shut and the way of salvation and the way of heaven is shut forever.

[16:10] Once you die, there's no second chance. I'm sorry, there is no such thing as reincarnation. There's no such thing as a second opportunity. Some people who think or hope that when they die, they'll be able to argue their way into heaven or sort of force their way in or wriggle their way in. The Bible makes it very clear. Every single person is appointed to die once and then face judgment.

Even here, as Jesus speaks to these people, you get this sort of sense in which he's answering people's thoughts about getting in afterwards. Once the door's shut, you get it? They're there standing outside knocking, pleading. And he preempts their arguments. And perhaps there's some of the arguments maybe that you have or others have about getting into the kingdom of God. First of all, sir, open the door for us. If I ask nicely, if I ask nicely, God will let me in, won't he? After all, God is love. God is good. God is gracious. These things are true. Oh, but so surely he's flexible. He's going to let me in. If I ask him nicely, he's not going to keep me out. He's too good a God to

keep people out of heaven, isn't he?

He is a good God. But the response to, sir, open the door for us is this, no. No. No. I don't know you. And I don't know where you're from. And then they persist.

They persist on knocking and they persist on pleading. And they, in one sense, claim some special privilege. There's a special reason, God, why you should let me into your kingdom. A special reason why I should come in when others don't. Here they say, we ate and drank with you. You taught in our streets. Now, of course, that pertains particularly to the people that Jesus ministered amongst in that time. Those people who were directly there.

They saw him. They met with him. They listened to his teaching. And just as an aside, let me put this to you. If you're one of those people who says, if only I could see Jesus, I'd believe in him. If only I could see God, I'd believe in him. If only I could actually hear him speaking to me as they did with Jesus, I'd believe in him. You wouldn't and you won't. Because these many thousands upon thousands heard Jesus teach and speak. They even saw him perform miracles.

[18 : 49] They even knew him and heard him and saw him and that they still didn't believe in him. So if your excuse is, I'm not in the kingdom of God because I need evidence and proof to see, then you never will have it and it would do you no good even if it did.

These people say, Lord, you walked with us. You talked with us. We heard about you. We met you. We might be tempted to think something similar in one sense. I go to church.

I've heard Jesus' teaching and I've read the Bible and I've even got members of my family who are Christians in the kingdom. And so I've always respected God and thought that you're a great God. And I've tried to live as good as I could possibly live. So surely you're going to let me in. The response of the owner to that sort of pleading or persuasion is no, no, no. And even more than that, the owner adds this, I don't know you or where you're from.

Away from me, all you evildoers. That's harsh, isn't it? That's judgmental on God's part to call those outside of the kingdom evildoers. Those who want to get in but have left it too late.

Who've had no time for God until now when death is cut, has come. You see, I don't know you.

Doesn't mean that God doesn't know you. He knows you. But he doesn't acknowledge you. That's what he's saying. On that day of judgment, on that day when we stand before God, God will not acknowledge you. Jesus said this just the same earlier in chapter 12. He says, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. If we disown God, in other words, we do not acknowledge him as my God and my Lord. If we will not put our faith in him and trust him, if we will not seek him and seek to make him the very Lord of our lives, us, then God will not acknowledge us. God will not acknowledge us. But this accusation of evildoers, you might think that that is hard and harsh on God's behalf, but actually, it's completely true.

[21 : 30] By refusing, by refusing the love and mercy and grace of God, by, as it were, spitting in the face of God, by saying, I do not want your forgiveness, and I do not want your grace, and I do not want you to be the Lord of my life, are we not acting in the most evil way? To throw back in the face of God the death of his Son, who suffered and died for our sins. Isn't it proof, dear friends, that if we will not have the love of God in our hearts, we would rather have the sin of our own hearts.

Jesus says the same in John chapter 3. He says, everyone who does evil hates the light. God is light. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. The biggest hurdle, ultimately, the biggest reason why men and women do not enter the kingdom of God is because of their own hearts. Because they love their sin.

Because they do not wish to hand over the reins of their lives to God. Because they think that they are good enough to get into heaven. Because they think that God will never judge them. And that they are better than other people. Now you may not say that. You may not even in your mind consciously think that, but by your actions, by your refusal to take Jesus Christ at his word. By your determination to live for everything else apart from striving and yearning for and longing for the kingdom of God. You're showing that in your heart and life you're an evildoer. But above all, dear friends, the most pressing reason why Jesus commands us to make every effort to enter the door is because of what it is like for those who remain outside. Verse 28, there will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth. These are those who are on the outside of the kingdom of God. Those who have no concern or care for him at this time. Those who think themselves to be good. Those who think that they do not need to be saved. But are happy in their own sin.

Dear friends, the picture of the world that we are given at the moment is this. We can live without God and life is good without God because he doesn't restrict us and he doesn't tell us what to do. And we don't need him anymore because we are so enlightened and clever. The picture will be so reversed on that day when men and women stand outside the kingdom of God and instead of there being pride and arrogance and self-congratulation, there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. There'll be the greatest sorrow the world has ever seen, the greatest sadness, the most awful cries of grief from the very depths of the soul.

And gnashing of teeth, that's frustration, that's self-loathing, that's kicking yourself with remorse. Distressing, terrible, comfortless emotion.

[25 : 07] Do you think God is, says these things, Jesus says these things because there is some perverse way within him? Because he likes to sort of tell us how bad we are. Isn't it because of his grace and goodness? Isn't it because of his love that he pleads with you and with all people? Come in and look at what it is that they are so frustrated about. Look at what it is that makes them weep so. You will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God. People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. As you're on the outside with all their self-loathing and all the regret, it's because you can see inside people, all sorts of people from all over the world, all sorts of people there feasting, banqueting, partying as it were, in the very presence of God filled with joy and gladness.

It's only then that men and women and perhaps even you yourself who have no thought for the kingdom of God or think the kingdom of God isn't worth bothering with. It's only then you'll realize how wrong you've been.

All this time when you've mocked Christians and the church, all this time when you've gone along with those who've ridiculed Christianity and the kingdom of God, all the time when you've rejected and said, I don't need and I don't want this kingdom of God. Only then will you realize how stupid, how foolish when people have told you again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and God himself and Christ himself have told you what a wonderful place it is to be.

It's only then when it's too late that you'll see all that you've rejected, all that you thought was worthless compared to the passing pleasures of this world, all that you were too proud to bow the knee to Jesus for, all that you were too wise in your own eyes to recognize, all that you were too lazy to seek after.

And then to see yourself thrown out into eternal despair, you will see Abraham and you will see yourselves thrown out.

[27 : 29] I don't make light of this dear friends, I don't find it easy, I don't think it's fun. Indeed, Jesus says, there are those who are last who will be first, those who are first who will be last.

The people of Jesus' day thought that they were the first amongst all the peoples of the world. They were the Jew. They were the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They were of the tribes of Jacob. They had the prophets of God.

They were so blessed and privileged. They thought that they were the first and that they would get into heaven and the kingdom of God. No trouble. But they were wrong.

They were wrong. And that's what Jesus is telling them. Those who you, you think you're first, you're going to be the last. And those people you think are last, the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people, those people who are sinners and failures, those people who are outside in the nations, they are the ones who you consider to be the last, but they will be the first.

They'll be there. They'll be in the kingdom and you'll be outside. And dear friends, you may imagine yourself to be a good person, certainly better than some of the people that you know and those people that are in prison and those people who are on the streets and those people.

[28 : 40] You're someone who deserves heaven, but you're wrong. And one of the great tragedies again will be that you who think you are first will find out that you're last. You see, there's going to be many wonderful surprises in heaven.

In fact, there's wonderful surprises in the kingdom of God now, but wonderful surprises in heaven, wonderful delightful joys, surprises that will light up our eyes, surprises which will blow our minds. But there'll be other surprises too, terrifying surprises. Surprises and shocks for those who thought they were first and thought that they were going there and thought that they were right and thought that they've got it all figured out, this God stuff, when they find out that they're shut out and cast out.

Make every effort. Let me urge you, dear friends, if you're not in the kingdom of God, make every effort. Put everything else off your diary.

Put everything else into its second place. Put it all on the back stove. Put everything behind. Putting this priority first. Seeking and entering the kingdom of God.

[29 : 58] There's nothing more important. There's nothing that matters most to your life and to eternity than this. And dear friends, those of us who by God's grace alone have entered into the kingdom of God, let's shout from the door, come in, come in.

Don't stay outside. Don't wait. Here's the invitation. Here's the call. The door is open. Surprise yourself and enter in today.

Let's sing together our final hymn.