The Door Is Open… For Now

Passage: Luke 13:22–35 | From the series: Luke
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I was sitting in the airport. Coffee in hand, earphones in, listening to music, waiting to board. Then suddenly, over the loudspeaker, I heard:

"Final boarding call for passenger Parker. Final boarding call for passenger Parker."

I looked up and realized I was at the wrong gate. And very quickly, I became *that guy*. The guy running through the airport, coffee spilling left and right, holding on to my bags as tight as I can, bobbing and weaving, trying to get to the gate.

I turned the corner and saw it: my gate, finally in view. And then that dreaded moment. The door to the gate closing right before my eyes. The gate agent looked at me and said, "Boarding has closed."

Closed? What do you mean closed? The plane is *right there!* Come on, just give me two minutes!

And she just looked at me. "The door is closed."

Here's what makes that moment so unsettling. I was so comfortable. Sitting, listening to my music, drinking my coffee, thinking I was where I was supposed to be. I was living on an assumption that turned out to be wrong.

Now, we can laugh about that, because it's an airport. You miss your flight; you catch the next one. Maybe pay a ridiculous change fee. Okay, a *really* ridiculous change fee. But what happens when the assumption is about where we stand with God?

In Luke 13, somebody asks Jesus how many people are going to be saved. Jesus doesn't give them a number. He points them to a door. And in his answer, he challenges the very things people were trusting in to secure their place in God's kingdom. Luke 13:22–25.

> *He 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.'"*

Back in Luke 9, we saw that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Here in chapter 13, Luke reminds us where Jesus is heading. He doesn't waste time mapping out the itinerary; he focuses on teaching and forming his disciples along the way.

On this journey, someone asks, "Will only a few people be saved?" That question sits at the bedrock of the human condition: who's in and who's out. And Jesus, in true Jesus fashion, answers

by redirecting the question to what matters more. Instead of giving numbers, he prompts listeners to ask: will the saved be you? He responds with a command: *Strive to enter through the narrow door.*

This word "strive" pictures exertion. Some translations say, "make every effort." The image is of an athlete contending for a prize, using every fiber of their being. That's a picture of discipleship with Jesus. It's not something we approach casually. But be careful here. Jesus isn't saying you can earn your way into God's kingdom through hard work. Salvation is a gift of grace. But receiving that gift means being willing to follow him with all your being. We live in a place that knows how to strive. We strive for the promotion, the next funding round, the right school for our kids, the home we've been hoping for. We understand what it means to give ourselves to something we believe matters.

So what would it look like to approach and respond to Jesus with that same seriousness?

When Jesus talks about a narrow door, he's drawing on an image his audience would have known well. Throughout Jewish wisdom literature, we find this idea of two ways: one leads to life, the other to destruction. Not every road leads to the same destination.

And Jesus says something that challenges our modern sensibilities: not every path leads to God. We live in a world that says, "Find your own truth. Follow your own path. As long as you're sincere, you'll get there." But Jesus says the door is narrow.

Think about the other doors we try. There's the door of **achievement**: if we can just accomplish enough, earn enough, or become successful enough, we'll finally have the life we're looking for. There's the door of **security**: if we can accumulate enough money, own the right home, and build a comfortable enough future, then we'll finally be safe. And there's the door of **self-sufficiency**: the belief that with enough knowledge, intelligence, and effort, we can ultimately save ourselves.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with working hard, planning for the future, or pursuing success. The problem comes when we start looking to those things for what only God can give. They're good things, but they make terrible saviors. Those doors look appealing because they promise us life without requiring us to surrender control. The narrow door calls us to stop trusting ourselves to secure the life that only Jesus can give.

God is not reluctant to welcome people into his kingdom. But we can't enter on our own terms. We have to trust Jesus wholeheartedly. And his warning is urgent, because the narrow door will not stay open forever.

Strive to Enter: Not Just Near

Luke 13:26–27

> *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!'*

Listen to how the people respond. "We ate with you. We had drinks with you. You taught in our streets. We've hung out." In other words: *Jesus, we know you. We've been around you.*

They aren't describing how they responded to Jesus. They're appealing to their proximity to him. And that's the danger: you can be familiar with Jesus without following Jesus. You can know a lot *about* him without knowing *him*.

In the parable, the master closes the door, people knock to get in, and he says, "I do not know where you come from." Don't miss what he means. He isn't saying, "I don't know what city you were born in." He's saying, *I don't know you.*

It's sort of like "knowing" one of your favorite celebrities. You follow them on social media and watch every interview. You know where they grew up, what they believe, what they ate for breakfast. You might know facts their own family doesn't. But if you walked up to their house and knocked on the door, they'd look at you and say, "I'm sorry, who are you?"

Knowing about someone isn't the same as knowing someone. These people had been around Jesus and heard his teaching, but proximity never became allegiance.

How might we make that same mistake?

- **Intellectually convinced.** You believe the Bible is true, agree with the claims of Christianity, can explain the doctrine, and hold your own in theological conversations. But has what you believe shaped how you live?
- **Culturally comfortable.** Church is comforting. You enjoy the music, the relationships, the rhythm of gathering. But is Jesus directing your life?
- **Religiously active.** You attend, serve on teams, give generously. But has that activity led you into deeper surrender to Jesus?

Jesus says, "Depart from me, all you workers of evil." Their issue wasn't that they didn't know *of* Jesus. It was that their proximity never produced a life responsive to him. Let's not settle for knowing about Jesus while resisting the life he's calling us to live.

Strive to Enter: Not Just Inherited

Luke 13:28–30.

> *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.*

Proximity wasn't the only thing they were relying on. There was also their heritage.

Look closer at verse 28. Jesus says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth *when* you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves cast out. Feel the emotional weight of those two expressions. Weeping pictures remorse and sorrow. Gnashing of teeth pictures rage and frustration.

Why is this so shocking? Many in Israel took their place in God's kingdom for granted. They were descendants of Abraham, God's covenant people. God made promises to their ancestors, delivered them from Egypt, gave them the law, and promised to restore them.

They were looking forward to that day. Isaiah 25 describes God's coming kingdom as a great banquet, a feast prepared by God himself, where death is swallowed up forever, tears are wiped away, and God's people celebrate his salvation. Imagine spending your entire life looking forward to that celebration, only to discover you're standing outside looking in. *That's the picture.*

They assumed that because they were descendants of Abraham, they'd automatically have a seat at the table. Jesus says ancestry doesn't guarantee entrance. Even more, in verse 29, people will come from east and west, north and south, from everywhere. People nobody expected. People never born into that heritage or religious upbringing. And they're the ones sitting at the table.

That's why verse 30 says the last will be first and the first will be last. You don't inherit your way into the kingdom. You enter through Jesus. Heritage is a gift, but it doesn't replace a response to the One God sent. As one theologian put it, "The only passports to the Kingdom are repentance and submission to God."

It's like showing up at the airport and telling the gate agent, "Listen, my dad has flown with y'all for 30 years. He's got status! Platinum, diamond, titanium, whatever y'all call it!" And the gate agent looks at you and says, "Sir, that's wonderful. But that's your *dad's* status."

You can't claim somebody else's status just because you're related to them. Your parents may have followed Jesus. Your grandparents may have walked faithfully with God. You may come from generations of people who loved the Lord. But *you* must strive to enter.

I wonder how many of us are trusting in our spiritual heritage. Maybe you grew up in church. Your parents were Christians. Your grandparents were Christians. You've been around Christianity your entire life. And hear me: that's a gift! What a blessing to have parents who prayed for you, taught you the Scriptures, and modeled what it looks like to follow Jesus. But here's what Jesus is confronting: you can inherit a Christian upbringing without ever personally embracing Christ.

And maybe you're reading this thinking, "Well, I didn't grow up in church. My parents weren't Christians. I don't have generations of faith behind me." Then notice what else Jesus says. People will come from east and west, north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God. People who never imagined they had a place at the table are being welcomed in. You don't have to come from a Christian family. You don't have to have grown up knowing the Bible. The invitation is extended to you, too.

Your heritage doesn't guarantee your entrance, and your history doesn't disqualify you from the invitation.

As Jesus continues toward Jerusalem, something interrupts the conversation. Luke 13:31–33.

> *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 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.'"*

I love Jesus' response. "Go and tell that fox…" I mean, Jesus is not intimidated! And when he calls Herod a fox, don't necessarily think clever or crafty. The image can also suggest someone insignificant compared to the authority Jesus carries.

Jesus won't let Herod's threats determine his direction. In verse 33 he says, "Nevertheless, I *must* go on my way." Don't miss that word. *Must.* It's the Greek word *dei* (δεῖ), and Luke uses it throughout his Gospel to communicate divine necessity.

When Jesus is twelve years old and his parents find him in the temple, he says, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" When the crowds want him to stay in one place, he says, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well."

Over and over, Luke reminds us that Jesus moves according to God's purposes. Herod may have his threats. The religious leaders may have their plans. But Jesus has a mission. He *must* go to Jerusalem, to complete that mission on the cross.

Remember that gate agent? She couldn't do a thing for me. The door was closed, and that was that. But Jesus isn't standing at the door waiting to turn people away. He's walking toward Jerusalem to give his life so the door can be opened.

Strive to Enter: Not Just Later

Luke 13:34–35

> *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!'*

Jesus has given a warning and a command to strive to enter the narrow door. But don't miss the heart behind it.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. This is what's called a double vocative, a repetition that intensifies the emotion of the call. Throughout Scripture we hear this kind of repetition at significant moments: Abraham, Abraham. Moses, Moses. Martha, Martha. Saul, Saul. Here, Jesus is lamenting over Jerusalem. His divine longing is to save, and they are rejecting their Messiah. *Jerusalem, Jerusalem.* He is grieving their refusal.

Jesus uses the picture of a hen: maternal protectiveness, tender care for her chicks. *I wanted to gather you.* And the tragedy is, "you were not willing."

Then in verse 35 he says, "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!'" These are sobering words. Jerusalem's unwillingness has consequences. The city that rejected God's messengers now faces judgment.

And in the context of everything Jesus has been saying, this is about more than getting the words right. It's about recognizing who Jesus is and receiving him as the King he truly is.

You can be near Jesus without responding to him. You can inherit a religious tradition without personally receiving him. And you can hear his invitation and still be unwilling to come.

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, "You were not *able*." He says, "You were not *willing*." Jerusalem didn't reject God's invitation just once. Again and again, God sent his messengers, and again and again, they refused to listen.

And here's what concerns me. For most of us, unwillingness doesn't sound like an outright no. It sounds like *not yet*. Someday. When life settles down. When the timing is better. The danger of "later" is that we start assuming we'll always have another opportunity.

Jesus is saying later is not guaranteed. The invitation is today, and today is the day to respond.

The Door Is Open

The same Jesus who warns us that the door will one day close is the Jesus who stands before us today with open arms. The warning is real, but so is the invitation.

The question isn't whether you've been around church your whole life. It isn't whether your parents believed, or whether you know the right words to say. The question is whether you've responded to Jesus. Because the door is open now. And the One inviting you in is the One who gave his life to make a way.

Don't mistake proximity for relationship. Don't mistake heritage for faith. And don't mistake an open door today for a door that will stay open forever.

The door is open… for now.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV.