

An Open Door – For Now Luke 13:22-30

Someone once said that great leaders tell great stories. Stories have a unique way of transporting us to another time, or another place, or with other people. They appeal to us and hold our attention, immersing us into the story so that we can identify with its characters. They can leave us wondering if we are the hero or heroine or the villain. They allow us to live vicariously through someone else's experience. A Stanford research project showed that when someone presents statistics we retain less than 10% of the information, but when it includes an anecdote or story retention increases to about 70%. Gifted story tellers match an important point with a story.

Jesus was a master at telling stories. They were a way to challenge the thinking of His day. To engage His audience He would sometimes lead the story with a rhetorical question, something to think about as He told the story which always had a point to consider and a choice to make. He would immerse His audience into the scene with objects from everyday life, things like mustard seeds, yeast, flowers, birds, children, or fishing. His conclusion was always direct, inciting His audience to action. At times He allowed for interaction as He did with the man who came asking what the greatest commandment was. In the response given by the man, Jesus continued by sharing the story of the Good Samaritan. What made Jesus such a compelling story teller that drew multitudes to hear Him was His authenticity. His audience always knew where He stood on a subject.

It is no different in our passage today found in **Luke 13:22-30**. We begin by noting a prevailing question.

I. A PREVAILING QUESTION – v. 22-23

Luke records for us that Jesus is once again moving

from town to town teaching as He journeys toward Jerusalem. The culmination of this journey will take Him to the capital city and the purpose for His coming to earth. Many people go through life wondering why they are here, what's their purpose. They try this job or that career hoping to find themselves, to find their purpose, their identity. Not Jesus. He knew who He was and He knew what He was here for – it was to save the lost. He not only knew His purpose, He knew the timing of when He needed to arrive in Jerusalem and the tense of the wording in our verse tells us that His journeying to Jerusalem was a continuous action. Every step, every town was a calculated part of the arriving at Jerusalem at just the right time.

Scholars tell us that He is in the region of Perea. It's located on the eastern side of the Jordan River just north of the Dead Sea. From here He will head north into Galilee and then back south through Jericho and then on to Jerusalem for His passion.

Somewhere along the way someone who had been traveling with Jesus asked a question. It may have been one of His disciples. It may have been someone who had traveled around with Him to hear Him teach or see what miracles He might perform. Whoever it was this person had looked around and made a mental note. Rolling it around in the old noodle this person came to Jesus with a question. It's voiced for us in verse 23.

“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

It's an interesting question that is posed from what appears to be a sincere follower. It seems from his question that he thought only a few would be saved. But it's not what Jewish people thought. They expected the Messiah to come and usher all Israel into His kingdom and receive salvation. Isaiah gives us some insight into why they believed that.

Isaiah 60:21-22

The average Jew felt quite secure in their belief that they would be part of God's eternal kingdom. After

all, they were His chosen people. They proudly took their lineage back to their founding father, Abraham and the covenant God made with him that from him would come a mighty nation, a chosen nation. If they really wanted to feel smug, they could trace their lineage back to Adam through the line of Seth and look at the promise God made that a Redeemer would come their family tree. They could reason that from the beginning they were God's chosen people. He singled out Abraham and called him from his pagan roots to be the Father of the nation.

If lineage wasn't enough, they also built their case through the law. God had given it to them. No other nation had God's law entrusted to them.

They had lineage, they had the law, and they had the land. It was the place God had given to them after they came out of slavery in Egypt.

The proverbial icing on the cake in addition to lineage, the law, and the land, they also had the Temple. (Sorry, I couldn't find a word that started with "L" that would substitute for Temple.) It was the symbol of God's presence.

To the Jewish people these were reason enough to believe that they had it made in the shade when it came to salvation. They didn't have anything to worry about. God was on their side. They reveled in their national pride and had convinced themselves that they were superior to the other nations because of all those perceived spiritual advantages.

But some astute observer looked around and witnessed that the numbers of people following Jesus had been dwindling. During a period of popularity thousands followed Him. At one point Scripture tells us He didn't even have time to eat or rest. But now it seemed like the crowd was thinning. At one point we are told that many followed Him no more because the cost to follow Him was too great. He spoke of the cost in **Luke**

9:23 "And He said to them all, 'If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me.'"

To be a follower of Jesus isn't easy. So the question – will only a few be saved?

Throughout His ministry people asked Jesus various questions.

The disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables. They asked Him why teachers of the Law said that Elijah must come first.

They asked Jesus why the fig tree had withered so quickly.

They asked Jesus when the Temple would be torn down.

They asked about a blind man and wondered who had sinned that he had been born blind.

A teacher of the law asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was.

John the Baptist's disciples came and asked Jesus if He was the Messiah.

The Pharisees asked Him when the kingdom of God would come.

Nicodemus asked Jesus how a person who was old could be born again.

A multitude asked Him what signs He would give that they might believe Him.

And here, someone asks Him if only a few are going to be saved. **What did the person mean?**

Both in Hebrew and Greek salvation implies deliverance, safety, preservation, and healing.

Let me tell you what being saved is not.

It is not deliverance from poverty.

It is not deliverance from poor health.

It is not health, wealth, and prosperity.

It is not national deliverance.

It is deliverance from God's wrath and His judgment that we are otherwise due because of sin.

It is deliverance through the sacrificial death of Christ.

Romans 5:9

I Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9

One author writes that salvation “is the great inclusive word of the gospel including all the redemptive acts and processes as justification, redemption, grace, propitiation (become favorably inclined), imputation (attribute to another), forgiveness, sanctification and glorification.”

We can look at salvation in the past, present and future.

Concerning the past, the Christian has been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin and is accomplished for all who believe at the time when they believe. All sin I committed before the day I trusted Christ as Savior has been forgiven.

Concerning the present, the Christian is released from the power of sin and joined with Christ being transformed into His likeness. This is accomplished now as we those who exercise faith for it.

Romans 6:1-2; 8:1-2

Galatians 2:19-20

Galatians 5:16

II Corinthians 5:17

Concerning the future, the Christian will be saved from the presence of sin. We will not be subject to the effects of sin that ravage us today: death, disease, and decay. All infirmities because of the curse of God on a sinful world will be done away.

Romans 8:18-23

I Corinthians 15:42-44, 51-57

I John 3:2-3

Revelation 21:4

Salvation is not by our goodness, but solely by God’s grace and it encompasses past, present, and future.

The question that was asked of Jesus was the prevailing question. People ask a similar question today when they wonder how good is good enough.

How does Jesus respond?

For this prevailing question Jesus has a penetrating response.

II. A PENETRATING RESPONSE – v. 24-30**A. Their Opportunities – v. 24**

Have you ever asked someone a question and their answer seemed a little evasive? You wish that they would just give a straight answer. Jesus purposely avoided answering the question directly. Instead of giving a number, for which the inquisitive person was looking, Jesus gave the person something to ponder. In essence Jesus wants the person to think about his own life, was that person saved. He wants us to think about where we will spend eternity. Instead of wondering how many would be saved, the real question is this: are you saved?

Jesus tells us to make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Many people think today there are many doors and so they pick one or two or three thinking it doesn’t matter which door you choose.

I was thinking about the different sizes of doors. I would guess that the doors at Cape Canaveral in Florida that open up for the rockets to be transported to the launch pad were quite big. The doors for a hanger where they work on the huge jumbo jets have impressive size. Then I thought about doors that are on houses with all their different shapes and sizes and decorations. Rich, I would guess you have hung more doors in your career than you care to count. Some doors have those little pet doors for your cat or dog to go in and out of the house.

Quite a few years ago Robyn bought a new sofa for the living room. The delivery guys showed up and eventually got the furniture into the house. On leaving they said if we ever remodeled our house

we should seriously consider widening the door frame. Now our house is stone and the door size is 32". A standard exterior door is 36".

Jesus says we are to make every effort to enter through the narrow door, a door that remains accessible for the time being. It suggests that there can only be one at a time that can fit through the door, implying that salvation will not be national. No one can be saved just because someone else in the family is saved or because you are part of some nation. We are called a Christian, but that doesn't mean all are saved.

The word **"strive"** used in the KJV suggests a fight or contend. It is the Greek word agonizomai from which we get our English word agonize. It's the same word used by Paul when talking about the effort of an athlete preparing to participate in the games. We also find it used to describe the agony Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane just before His betrayal and death.

That we are to **"make every effort to enter through the narrow door"** is not suggesting that salvation is all on us, that salvation is by our effort in working to get there. The struggle implied here is one of self-denial that leads to repentance, that we make every effort to understand how to be saved. It is understanding that there is only one way to be saved and if you want to be part of the kingdom of God you must enter through the one door provided. Jesus would tell His disciples that He is the Way. He would tell His disciples that He is the gate and that whoever enters through Him would be saved.

Jesus' response also indicates that many are going to try and enter but will be unable.

They're going to try through hard work.

They're going to try through being religious.

They're going to try by being tolerant of all religions.

They're going to try by being generous.

They want a wide door, an all-inclusive door.

That way is easy, attractive, permissive. It has few rules and few restrictions. For them it's an open door policy. It says that eventually everyone will get in, but Jesus says here that many will try to enter but will be denied access.

Any effort on their part isn't good enough.

There is only one way, one door. You can't get in by making another door. You can't get in by trying to scale the wall or dig a tunnel. There is only one door, it's a narrow door and therefore there is only one right door. When we tell others that there is only one way to be saved, we aren't proclaiming our own view about religion, we are proclaiming God's revealed truth. The narrow gate implies that we have to strip ourselves of anything that we might otherwise think can merit salvation, all our self-righteousness and come through the only means available – the way God provided through His Son.

Jesus says there is only one way, and He is that way. They had plenty of opportunity to enter through the narrow door but squandered them.

B. Their Objections – v.25-27

He illustrates their plight with the story of a homeowner who gets up and closes the door. It's shut tight, but many are outside knocking on the door wanting to get in, desperate to get in. Notice their objections to the decision of the owner who refused to open the door.

The first objection is their *pleading*. We see it in vs. 25. They were appealing to the kind nature of the owner to let them in. Surely his love and compassion would compel him to open the door. And isn't that the argument of many today? It doesn't matter what they do in this life, if God is loving, kind, and benevolent He won't condemn anyone to hell. But the door is shut and he won't open it again and they plead some more that it isn't fair or they deserve another chance.

The imagery that comes to mind is the account of Noah. He was instructed to build that large boat. It was to be a large enough to hold the different kinds of birds and animals. It was also big enough to house others who would trust God for refuge in the Ark from His judgment. For 100 years Noah preached while building the Ark that God was going to flood the world in judgment for man's wickedness but man continued to squander their opportunities choosing to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to what was coming. At the appointed day, God brought together all those who were to enter the Ark and after they had entered through the only door that was built into it and **Genesis 7:16** says that **"the Lord shut him in."** There was only one way in. There was only one way for mankind to be saved and there was more room on the Ark than just for 8 people and the birds and animals. And God closed and sealed the door. Those inside were saved and safe.

Jesus is the only door by which we can be saved and His Spirit seals us until the day of redemption. But I can imagine as the waters came and the floods began to rise, many rushed to the Ark pounding on the door, begging to be let in, pleading for their lives "Open the door, we don't want to die. We're sorry." Maybe some tried to scale the sides of the Ark. Others may have tried to float on anything that appeared to be buoyant. But God's message was clear and once the door was shut it was too late for them. Anyone not inside the Ark was wiped out from the face of the earth. Except for the 8 inside the Ark, the entire world population had squandered their opportunity.

In the story Jesus tells, not only did they plead for their life they also made it *personal*. Notice vs. 26. Desperate to get in, they call on the owner to remember some personal aspects of their relationship. They ate and drank together. Eating was symbolic of fellowship, companionship, or friendship. Hey, we hung out together. We spent time in the backyard over a barbecue. We shopped

in the same stores, went fishing together. Is this any way to treat a friend? They thought that association was a good enough reason to have a second chance.

If that weren't enough, their tactics included one more appeal. They thought since he *taught* in their town that was reason to have the door opened. There are many people today who will use the same argument when they find that the door is shut. We went to all the church socials and even had the pastor over for dinner. We gave to the poor.

We attended every service and even read our Bible all the way through – twice.

We listened to your sermons and attended Bible conferences to hear some notable teachers.

All that should count for something.

In each case the response of the owner is the same

"I don't know you or where you come from."

It's like sudden amnesia, but it's more than just forgetting someone's name, there wasn't an intimate or personal relationship.

Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46

When the door is shut and they are told to get away, to depart, it is permanent. It's forever.

These people banging on the door didn't get it. They failed to see the opportunities around them. And in Jesus' story in Luke 13 the owner refused to open the door because they had refused the opportunity to enter when they had the occasion to do so. It's like sitting in the terminal at the airport listening to the flight attendant make all the announcements to board the plane and you sit there talking or reading or texting making no effort to get up, and when the last call is given and the door is shut that's when you jump up and run to the door banging to get on board, but it's too late.

The point is that we must respond when the invitation to enter has been given because there will be a time when it will be too late and the judgment

will be final. Judgment will come to those who reject the message of salvation.

They had opportunity.

They had objections.

Notice their outcomes.

C. Their Outcomes – v. 28-30

The Phillips translation reads **“there will be tears and bitter regrets.”** There will be tremendous sorrow and emotional agony by those who chose not to enter the narrow door.

What Jesus says is revolutionary to them because they thought being descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and having the prophets would grant them the right to be part of the kingdom, but God says when they see they are not in heaven with these patriarchs theirs will be bitter anguish and torment. What will be an even greater shock will be seeing Gentiles there as well. Those they thought would be last will be first. Those they thought should be first would be last. That’s what is meant in the reference to people from the east, west, north, and south. Heaven isn’t just for one generation or for one nationality – all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And they shouldn’t be surprised by this because that’s what the prophets also proclaimed.

Isaiah 56:6-7

The narrow door remains open. Know for sure today that you have entered through it. Don’t leave here today with a false sense of security, believing you’re okay when you have yet to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Don’t wait.

Don’t put it off thinking you have time, because we never know when God will close the door.

Don’t let pride keep you from entering the narrow door, thinking that there are other ways just as plausible as God’s way.

And as some have concluded, don’t think that such a door even exists. They will find that when the door is shut, it is shut for good. This is a graphic picture of those who were concerned too late and the opportunity was gone forever.

A Spanish composer by the name of Manuel de Falla was notorious for not responding to mail. When he heard that friend had died he said “What a pity! He died before I could answer his letter, which he sent me 5 years ago.”

Warren Wiersbe calls this a “picture of people who are overwhelmed with regret because they see how foolish they were to delay, but, alas, it is too late. One of the agonies of hell will be the remembrance of opportunities wasted.”

When God shuts the door John MacArthur notes “the sentence is final and the departure is eternal.”

In our passage today we have seen a *prevailing question*. **Will there be just a few who are saved?** We have considered a *penetrating response*. Jesus turns the question into something that is personal. It isn’t how many will be saved, the question is – will I be saved?

I want to close with a personal decision

III. A PERSONAL DECISION

Salvation is not automatic. We can’t enter by virtue of good words, or good works, or good ways. The door is narrow, but many try to make it broad.

A West Indian man who chose Islam over Christianity said his reason for doing so is that Islam “is a noble, broad path. There is room for a man and his sins on it. The way of Christ is too narrow.”

After a visit to Melbourne, Australia by Billy Graham a letter was written to the daily newspaper expressing the attitude of a person not wanting to

enter the only door available for salvation. Here's what the letter said: "After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television and reading reports and letters concerning him and his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul (and everyone else's) needs saving – whatever that means, I have never felt that I was lost. Nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children of goodness and not sin. If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned."

What door are you trying to go through?

If it weren't for the grace of God, the failure rate would be 100%. No one would get through the door. We would all be like those in the story banging on the door, begging and pleading with the owner to let us in, and he would justifiably tell us to leave. But praise God, He has made a way for us to enter. It's a narrow door, but a door none the less. That door is Jesus.

John Newton once said that when he got to heaven he would be surprised at who was not there he thought would be. He would be surprised by those who are there he didn't think would be, but he would be most surprised that he would be there.

It is very clear from Scripture that we are all outside because of sin. Every one of us has done wrong and gone our own way. There isn't a person that is good.

Scripture is also very clear that because of sin, our deserved punishment is death, not just physical death as part of the curse of sin, but spiritual death, eternal separation from God because we have violated His standard. **Proverbs 14:12** tells us that

there is a way that seems right, but it will end in destruction.

We also find in Scripture that God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us. He died the death we deserve in order to give us the life we don't deserve.

The Bible is also very clear that this life is something we cannot earn on our own. It is by grace through faith, believing that what Jesus did on the cross appeased the wrath of God and paid the debt of sin which was death.

When we believe in Jesus we are given the right to become the children of God and accordingly have been granted eternal life. If you have the Son, you have life, if you don't have the Son you don't have life.

It's just like choosing whether or not you want to enter through a narrow door. There is only one way, one door. Jesus wants us make sure we enter before it's too late. The number of how many will be saved is not relevant. The real question is whether you are saved.

If you are not saved or aren't sure, today is the day because we don't know how much longer before God will close the door and the opportunity will be gone for good.

If you are saved, the task is to point others to Christ the door. You can't take them through the door, they have to choose that for themselves. Make sure you're going to heaven through the right door.