

July 22, 2018

Lesson 7: Entering God's Kingdom

Scripture: Luke 13: 22-30

Context:

Our scripture shifts to another chapter in Luke where Jesus talks about a different form of justice. As he continues to move towards Jerusalem, he goes through multiple cities and villages, preaching in the synagogues and healing whenever he meets people. With all these people coming to hear him preach, there is the practical question of what will it take to follow Jesus. So an unnamed person asks the question, "Lord, will only a few be saved?"

Jesus takes the moment as an opportunity and speaks in parable form. He talks about a narrow gate, which will be shut when the owner is ready. There are those who will want to stand at the door and be able to come and go as they please. Yet, the owner will be resolute and will instruct them to leave. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other prophets will be dinner guests in God's kingdom, as the others will not be issued a passage through the gate. Those who were last will be the first ones served and those who are first will be last.

The question though is not to be just imagined as by someone who was on Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. The question should also come from the reader who has felt the weight of Jesus's journey as he comes across hordes of people. However, the verse with the "door" conveys a different meaning than one would think. The door refers to a moment; that in which Jesus comes to teach and heal, meaning he holds the key to that moment in time. The kingdom consists of when he comes and those who follow him. This includes the faithful in Israel and the outsiders, the Gentiles.¹ The gospel writer is making the point that Jesus is the one who determines who is "saved" and part of the kingdom. It is not about what people decide or choose. Jesus already saved the world by coming to it as God in flesh.

Jesus asserts that following him is more difficult than the person can understand. For his kingdom, there is a narrower path and one needs to have more than casual interest.² Thus, as Jesus goes about preaching, he is looking for disciples, not those who will listen and then later say that they heard him preach or that they know one of his people very well. There is an added task that comes with being associated with Jesus, one that cannot be tied up with a little prayer or a checklist.

Application

I always heard the most fascinating interpretations of this passage. Some have tried to say that this passage means that you had to "get saved," and commit your life to the Lord real quick and constantly. There's a checklist to follow to make sure you enter Heaven's pearly gates.

¹ Fred B. Craddock, "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 172.

² *Ibid.*, 172.

Other interpretations focus on servanthood, as indicated by the last verse of the passage. You have to be last in order to be first; so that means serve everyone else and then you will be a true follower of Jesus. Make sure you're the last in line for fellowship supper, especially if you work at the church!

Yet when I read this passage, I hear something else. I hear that Jesus is giving us an incredible opportunity. I imagine that Jesus is in a beautiful historic neighborhood and has a house with a wide window giving a glimpse of a dinner table with the most delectable food you can imagine. There is a white picket fence with a little gate at the front. The invitation is open to all; come to the party! It is all laid out for you.

However, the catch is that it will have all sorts of people; that invitation is for everyone. That includes the people you do not know or who do not look like you. And then there's the fact that the party starts at six and with all those courses, you have to show up on time.

So what do you do? You can join the feast or sulk because you did not get a look at the guest list. You can spend all your time at the gate angry and then suddenly realize you missed the dinner bell and you're left out. The only person to blame is your self.

This passage is not for us to figure out who is in and who it out of God's redeeming love. It is a passage about Christian discipleship and how we are to live in God's kingdom. Our job is to follow Jesus and his teachings. We are called to do what he has asked us to do by feeding the hungry, taking care of our neighbor, and living in peace with one another as much as it is up to us. As we do, we delight in the table Jesus has prepared for us on this earth. We learn to see Christ in others and may be surprised at the delight we have with people from all walks of life. We enjoy delicious food and discover that we all need nourishment, physically, socially, and spiritually.

In our churches, our question is not to be "are they/you saved?" God has already saved them/ us. Our questions should be how we are testifying in gratitude and thanksgiving to that wonderful gift and how are we being Christ's hands and feet. If we are to be proper dinner guests at Christ's table, our focus should be on making sure that we make room at the table and that we be open to whoever may be our dinner companion. Christ will take care of the rest and will be the host who will make sure that our plates are full and that we always have a place at the table.

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