

Sermon: Who's Going to Heaven?

Text: Luke 13:22-30

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Introduction: Dr. D. James Kennedy, who was on TV for years, was famous in Christian circles for a book he wrote entitled *Evangelism Explosion*. He is also remembered for two questions (pp. 26-27) that he would pose to people.

“Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven?”

“Suppose that you were to die today and stand before God and he were to say to you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ What would you say? That’s a pretty good question, isn’t it?”

In Jesus’ time the question of who and how many people would be saved was also a popular one among rabbis.

Luke 13:22-23ab (NIV) ²²Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ^{23ab}Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

Everyone has their own idea about who will be going to heaven. Some are very inclusive taking the attitude that everybody will be there. We call people who believe that: “universalists.” Others are very exclusive (i.e. you and I, and I’m not really sure about you kind of attitude). Sadly, we have had that within our own Restoration Movement.

Joke: Qualifying for Heaven - Recently a teacher, a garbage collector, and a lawyer wound up together at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter informed them that in order to get into Heaven, they would each have to answer one question.

St. Peter addressed the teacher and asked, “What was the name of the ship that crashed into the iceberg? They made a movie about it.”

The teacher answered quickly, “That would be the Titanic.” St. Peter let him through the gate.

St. Peter turned to the garbage man and, figuring Heaven didn’t *really* need all the odors that this guy would bring with him, decided to make the question a little harder: “How many people died on the ship?”

Fortunately for him, the trash man had just seen the movie. “1,228,” he answered. “That’s right! You may enter.”

St. Peter turned to the lawyer and said: “Name them.”

There are not going to be questions like that on the entrance exam to heaven. The only important question is: do you know Jesus? “Who’s going to heaven?” is still a valid question that everyone should ponder. Ultimately God is the judge of a person’s eternal destiny, but there are standards, too.

There is no more important relationship than the one you have or don’t have with your Creator. Let me tell you who’s going to heaven.

Those Who Recognize:

I. The Narrow Door (vv. 23c-24).

Luke 13:23c-24 (NIV) He said to them, ²⁴“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

A. Effort is needed to enter.

The Greek word (*agonizomai*) is translated “strive” (KJV), and here “make every effort” (NIV) The word can mean “to engage in an athletic contest, to fight, struggle, to strive.” - Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek N.T.*, pp. 181-182

Jesus is saying that what is required to go into the Kingdom is commitment and discipline to his way. It is narrow because the opportunity is unique. One can only enter the kingdom through Jesus. He is the door. He is the only way. He is the life and truth, the gospel writer John tells us.

If you consult a harmony of the gospels it will show Jesus going to Jerusalem for the eight-day Feast of Dedication. It was there he proclaimed that He was the Good Shepherd, The Door (Gate). When asked if he was the Christ (Messiah), Jesus said that he and the Father were one. And the Jews wanted to stone him. Jesus left and went out to an area east of the Jordan called Perea (**John 10:22-39**) where he gave this teaching we are looking at today.

Because Jesus was providing a new way to God, no one should conclude that it is just another system of rules and regulations.

B. A proper understanding is required.

There is nothing wrong with rules and laws, in fact, they are needed. But that is not the basis of one's coming into the kingdom.

The gospel, the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, is what a person needs. Being a child of Abraham (proper blood line), having and keeping the Law of Moses, and being under that covenant (shown by circumcision) was not enough. Jesus' idea of salvation included everyone who would put their faith in Him.

Matthew talks about a narrow way while Luke calls Jesus' demands a narrow door. I believe these are synonymous ideas. "To confess and testify to the truth as it is in Jesus, and at the same time to love the enemies of that truth, his enemies and ours, and to love them with the infinite love of Jesus Christ, is indeed a narrow way." - Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p. 211

The Jews could not fathom other people groups going to heaven. And within their own people there were Pharisees and Sadducees, Samaritans and the like, each doubting each other's ability to be in the Kingdom.

Jesus says: "you want to go to heaven?" You have to come through (by) me. There is no other system or person who will get you where you want to go ([John 14:6](#)).

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Those Who Recognize:

II. The Timeliness of God's Offer ([vv. 25-27](#)).

[Luke 13:25-27 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁵Once 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.' ²⁶"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

A. An open door will be closed.

It is crystal clear from the text there is a time of opportunity and also a point when the offer of salvation will be taken off the table. There are deadlines for everything. On April 15th there was one! Yet, the penalty for being late, or even not filing your tax return, pales in comparison to the consequences in our story.

Maybe a better analogy would be running for political office. If you do not file your name in time with the corresponding paperwork and signatures, you can't run for office. A lot of different offers have deadlines and eventually expire.

“For individuals, the door shuts at death--if not before, because of the hardness of one's heart...There are no *post-facto* opportunities.” - Bock, Luke, pp. 380-381

“Hell is nothing but truth known too late” - J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 3:134

B. A real relationship must be built.

There is a big difference between a casual acquaintance and a deep, dear friendship. The fact that some of Jesus' audience had heard him teach would not be able to be used as a reason for being included in the meal once the door was shut. Nor would eating a little bread and fish one afternoon at the lake be a compelling reason for admittance through that door either.

We all know the difference between acquaintances and friends. Acquaintances, are those who just want something, will talk to you, at you and about you. A genuine friend will talk *with* you. A friend is someone you can call for help at three in the morning and they will come. An acquaintance will look at the caller ID and say: “now what do *they* want?”

I attended a seminar once with Max Lucado where he taught all morning with me in the front row. I have read a number of his books. I know Max Lucado, but I guarantee you he does not know or remember me.

You might remember the names Michael and Taraq Salahi who crashed a White House party trying to get close to the Obamas. The Salahis had also tried to get into the Presidential Box at the Inauguration. They had produced a phony parking pass hoping that would get them access.

God will not be fooled when it comes to his kingdom feast. Entrance through the door, which is Jesus Christ, will only come with the proper credentials. You will need to be truly on the list.

Jesus was saying that a person should not presume that a casual relationship with God will provide access from hell to heaven.

John 8:19 (NIV) ¹⁹Then they (Pharisees) asked him, “Where is your father?” “You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

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Those Who Recognize:

III. The Need of a Proper Response (vv. 28-30).

Luke 13:28-30 (NIV) ²⁸“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. ²⁹People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

And no response is still a response... No RSVP means you don’t want to go. We do not want to hear Jesus say to us “Away from me, all you evildoers!”

A proper response is needed:

A. To avoid exclusion.

We must not only recognize our need and the offer of salvation, we must accept it. Grace is the way we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, but you need to understand that faith is a way of life as well as a way of thinking.

The final criterion for admittance will not be race, or achievement, but true repentance and faith. Many of the credentials people might use to impress others will not mean anything if they do not truly know Jesus.

The difference between inside and outside is heaven and hell. And hell will be no picnic, excluded from God and all his goodness. Suffering will be intensified because of seeing what one has missed by not loving God back.

A proper response is needed:

B. To be included.

You will need to be known by the master of the house. No one will trick him, because he will know who is on the list.

Revelation 20:15 (NIV) ¹⁵If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Even though we are not saved by works. Works are what indicate to God that we are seriously committed to him and his Kingdom. We need to live our lives in a way that honors that decision.

“The way which the Son of God trod on earth, and the way which we too must tread as citizens of two worlds on the razor edge between this world and the kingdom of heaven could hardly be a broad way. The narrow way is bound to be right.” - Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p. 212

Because there are only two final categories (in or out, excluded or included), we ought to live with heaven in mind.

Conclusion: I believe the Word of God, and when I go there I am afraid for some of the people I know. They are good people, some maybe better than you and I, but they don't know Jesus. I know some day we will all be out of time, either at our death or at Jesus' next coming. And for some, it will be sooner than that because their hearts have become so hard and resistant to God's word - nothing penetrates their hearts anymore. It is then that the Book will be closed and everyone's eternity will have been set.

Hebrews 9:27-28 (NIV) ²⁷Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

That's good news if you have given your life to Jesus. It is terrible news if you have rejected him.

II Corinthians 6:1-2 (NIV) ¹As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ²For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

That's Good News if you accept God's gracious offer, today!

Please do not delay!