

Narrow Doors, Gnashing Teeth, and Murdered Prophets  
Luke 13:22-35  
February 13, 2022  
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Read Luke 13:22-35

*“The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.”* (Psalm 12:6)

### **Introduction**

One of my kids asked me recently, “Which is busier: the stairway to heaven or the highway to hell?” So I started to explain, “Well, AC/DC songs are pretty simplistic in terms of chord progressions, I don’t think ‘Highway to High’ is that hard to play. ‘Stairway to Heaven,’ on the other hand has some really intricate fingerpicking by Jimmy Page, along with dynamic and tempo changes.” And they stopped me and said, “No, I’m talking about people going to heaven or going to hell.” “Oh! I’ll be preaching on that in a couple weeks, I’ll tell you then.” What a great dad move, right? The only way you get answers from me is if you stay awake while I’m preaching! True story (mostly).

The Gospel means good news, right? We as Christians believe that we have the best news ever – that you can be saved from your sins and go to heaven when you die by placing your trust in Jesus and being forgiven for everything that you’ve ever done. The problem is that many people don’t hear that as good news; they hear it as judgmental and unloving and bad news because it starts with the idea that human beings have earned God’s wrath and that there is a hell for people who continue in their rebellion to God. And, yes, we agree that that is the bad news, but please just embrace the good news so that the bad news no longer applies to you. But people are still upset that we would believe that anyone goes to hell, because that means they know people who have not or will not repent, turn to Jesus and be spared eternity in hell.

Enter the Christian universalist: someone who wants to make everything all better by agreeing with both sides. Yes, Jesus is the only way to God, but also yes, even if someone denies Christ in this life, they’ll get a chance in the next life. Rob Bell is probably the latest in a long line of people who have taught these ideas. He came out with a book about a decade ago called *Love Wins* (which I don’t recommend). The main idea behind the book is that God’s not really going to punish people for eternity, that eventually He’ll bring everybody into the kingdom, even if it takes the afterlife to accomplish that. One quote from the book: “the love of God will melt every hard heart, and even the most ‘depraved sinners’ will eventually give up their resistance and turn to God.”<sup>1</sup> Well, that sounds great and if that’s what the Bible teaches, I would say let’s embrace that and tell everyone we know. But if it’s not what the Bible teaches, I’d say that’s a recipe for disaster. That’s giving people false hope for something that will not happen. What did Jesus say? Will there be a second chance for people who don’t embrace the gospel in this life? Let’s turn to our text and see how Jesus weighed in on this very important question.

### **I. Many “Insiders” Will Be Standing Outside the Kingdom (vv. 22-27)**

*<sup>22</sup> He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup> And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. <sup>25</sup> When once the*

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), p. 107.

*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.'*<sup>26</sup> *Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.'*<sup>27</sup> *But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'*

When someone asked Jesus if those who are saved would be few in verse 23, it's most likely that they were expecting Jesus to say, "Yes." But for different reasons than we would think. They would have assumed that Jesus would say, "Of course, all good Jews will be saved, except for the ones who have engaged in idol worship or outright apostasy. Very few Gentiles will be saved except for a couple of outsiders who helped the Jews like Rahab or who became Jewish through marriage, like Ruth. So, yes, it's going to be few who are saved, but they'll deserve it." That was the mindset of the Jewish nation. But that's not how Jesus answered, and it's definitely not how Jesus thought. In fact, His second sentence to them said that many of you Jews who seek to be saved will not be.<sup>2</sup>

What verb did Jesus use in verse 24? Did He say "pick" the right door or "walk through" the narrow door? No, He used the phrase "*strive to enter*." The Greek word is *agonizesthe* (you can hear the root of the English word "agonize" there); it means "make every effort."<sup>3</sup> It's not that you're piling up a bunch of works to be saved, but that it needs to be your greatest priority, whether you are getting through the door of salvation or not. This is not something that you make blind, lazy assumptions about. Focus and make sure you're going the right way and through the right door.

The many people on the outside of the door, on the outside of the kingdom will be dumbfounded because they assumed the Master knew who they were. They were part of the community eating and drinking in His presence and hearing Him teach in the streets. How can the Master not know them now or allow them in? Jesus essentially said, "That's not enough. You didn't try to come in when you had the chance. You didn't acknowledge me and learn from me when you could have. Your works are evil and you should have changed your ways when there was time." Once the door is shut, it will be too late. Jesus urges them and us to believe NOW!

There is a parallel passage in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:21-23: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*" That is a chilling teaching from Jesus, that even people who were engaged in what they thought were acts of ministry might not be known and acknowledged by Him. Why? Because they never nailed down the most basic thing of all: you must be saved by knowing Jesus and submitting your life to Him. It doesn't matter what you ran around doing or who you thought you were doing it for. If you miss a living, vital relationship with Jesus, you miss salvation, pure and simple.

Now I want to caution us that these passages aren't teaching that there are a bunch of people who want to come to salvation during this lifetime, but God has decided to be mean and shut the door on them. Because that can be what this sounds like, right? No, these passages are about people who went their own way and ignored God on earth, but then they stand before God in judgment, and they assume that they should be saved even though they never responded to Jesus' call on their lives. That's when God says, "You rejected me on earth, you did not respond when there was time."

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 528.

<sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 380.

C.S. Lewis once said, *“There are only two kinds of people in the end: Those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it... No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”*<sup>4</sup> Outward contact or superficial familiarity with Jesus counts for nothing, what He is looking for is an inward response and commitment.

## **II. Many “Outsiders” Will Be Feasting in the Kingdom (vv. 28-29)**

*<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”*

Now we find out that this passage is less about restricting those who come to salvation, it’s more about expanding it. Yes, Jesus was telling the Jewish people of His day that, even though they expected to be included in God’s eternal kingdom, that they would be excluded if they didn’t know Him. The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and all the prophets from Israel’s history will be in heaven, included in the kingdom, as would be expected; they looked ahead in faith to the coming Messiah. But guess who else will be there? Gentiles, outsiders, peoples, tribes, and tongues from all over the world. That’s what verse 29 means – people will come from every corner of the earth through the narrow door to feast in God’s kingdom. What a jarring teaching to the Israelites, who thought they were God’s chosen people no matter what. They will be weeping and gnashing their teeth that they are not able to sit at the kingdom feast with the fathers of their faith. They’ll have to watch as the people they looked down on and never thought would be favored by God, the Gentiles, would be feasting as well.

Jesus says what Paul will expound on later in Romans 9 (**turn there, please**): verse 6: *“...not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”* He’s just listed all the amazing advantages that the Jews had in verses 4-5: *“...to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ...”* They had all of these amazing things in their heritage, even Jesus Himself was one of them; but it’s not enough! Jump to verses 30-32: *“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.”* Only the Jews who know and put their faith in Jesus will be part of the kingdom; they couldn’t gain entrance to the kingdom by merely following the law. All the Gentiles who believe in Him by faith will take their place. Somebody may accuse me of anti-Semitism; far from it, I am simply teaching what two Jewish men taught, with the earnest desire that all who are Jewish would acknowledge the Messiah who was the culmination of their faith; who was proclaimed all through the Old Testament, who appeared and His own people, for the most part, did not know Him.

So in one sense, Christianity is exclusive: only those who come to faith in Jesus will be saved. But in a greater sense, it is the most inclusive: you don’t have to meet any other standards of birth, intelligence, socio-economic level, nationality, ability, popularity, achievements, anything. All you have to do is sin, then realize that sin hurts you and separates you from God, and that Jesus can deal with your sin problem. The only thing you need to do to save yourself is to say that you can’t save yourself, only Jesus can.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Martindale and Jerry Root, ed, *The Quotable Lewis*, (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1989), p. 293.

Our last five verses continue with this theme, that

### **III. The “Chosen People” Will Reject Jesus (vv. 31-35)**

*<sup>31</sup> At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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.’ <sup>34</sup> 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! <sup>35</sup> 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!’”*

We’re not sure why Herod wanted to kill Jesus; we know that he killed John the Baptist for John’s criticizing his illegitimate marriage, but there was no such confrontation recorded between Jesus and Herod. We’re used to the Pharisees pestering Jesus and being angry at Him, eventually plotting to kill Him. But here, they showed concern for Jesus’ safety, warning him about Herod. Some commentators, though, have suggested that what looks like concern was actually a manipulative way for the Pharisees to have Jesus run away from Herod, which would also get Him out of their hair and stop causing so many problems for them.<sup>5</sup> Jesus clearly did not care that Herod wanted to kill Him, He knew what lay ahead of Him and He would not die at Herod’s hands. He would continue His ministry as usual until He got to Jerusalem where He would be killed by order of Pilate.

Jesus called Herod a fox and then called Himself a hen. Verse 22 tells us that Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem. So here, He addressed the city that He was coming to. The city that was the high holy city for a thousand years, since the days of King David. A city that, Jesus notes, kills her prophets and that will kill Him. He had grown up going to Jerusalem, He loved the city, the temple and the people. He would rather embrace them than see them rejected. That’s what verse 34 is about – wanting to be the hen who “*gathers her brood under her wings.*” But the city would choose to be Jesus’ enemy, a foreshadowing of the events that will happen in His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. And in turn, they would be forsaken by God. In 40 years, around the year AD 70, the Romans would attack Jerusalem and tear down the temple and the city, killing thousands of its people. This would not be a random political event; this would be God’s judgment and punishment on His people who had rejected Jesus. “Your house is forsaken because you have forsaken Me.”

### **Conclusion**

Recently someone told me that the Old Testament is dark and scary, but that the New Testament is more upbeat and full of grace. Let’s have a Pop Quiz: in which testament are the following verses?

*–“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devils and his angels.” -The NT book of Matthew 25:41b*

*–“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.” - The NT book of 2 Peter 2:4,9*

*–“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His holy ones, to execute the judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” – The NT book of Jude 14b-15*

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<sup>5</sup> Bock, p. 382.

*“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” – The NT book of Revelation 21:8*

Please don't separate the Old and New Testaments and think that the Old is only full of violence, vengeance and wrath, but the New is only full of grace, love, and forgiveness. The Bible is one united book that has both justice and mercy, both wrath and forgiveness, both grace and punishment woven into its story from start to finish.

You might have heard a song on the radio that was in the recent movie, *A Star is Born*. It's called "Maybe It's Time" and it's sung by Bradley Cooper, who plays a troubled rock star in the movie.

Here are some of the lyrics:

"Maybe it's time to let the old ways die / Nobody knows what waits for the dead / Some folks just believe in the things they've heard and the things they read / Nobody speaks to God these days / I'd like to think He's looking down and laughing at our ways / When I was a child they tried to fool me / They said the worldly man was lost and that Hell was real / Well, I've seen Hell in Reno and this world's one big old Catherine wheel spinning steel / Maybe it's time to let the old ways die."

The song seems to be pretty clear that nobody really understands God and the afterlife, and that we need to rethink everything that we've been taught before about religion; ditch the old ways. Notice what the songwriter says: I like to think of God as sitting up there laughing at us. How does he know that? He just thinks that's a better view of God than someone who sends people to hell. So the message is: make up who you think God is and ignore what Christians say is the revealed will of God in the pages of Scripture. That's actually not a new idea, that's as old as Genesis 3 – in the Garden of Eden the serpent said, "Did God really say?" And that's the same thing that song is saying.

Will people who sin (which is all people) and remain unrepentant with no one to atone for their sins be punished for eternity when they die? Unless you want to call Jesus a liar the answer is "Yes." And this is one of the hardest things for people in our day to accept. It's so narrow, it's so exclusive. It can be hard for Christians to appreciate and defend. We wish we could have that answer that satisfies everybody, like the Christian Universalists. But it's either we make up our own theology or we take the Bible at its word and teach it. A very important distinction we have to make is that the call to be saved is universal. No one who comes to Jesus will be turned away. We should tell everyone we can that they will be saved if they believe in Jesus, in His life, death, and resurrection. But the road to salvation is narrow because most people will not believe that Jesus is the key to salvation, and they'll remain in their sin and rebellion to God.

People who grew up in the church often act like the Jews of Jesus' day: we are part of the community of God, we've been around it all our lives, we're good to go with God. I've been in church basically all my life and seen all kinds of people who just show up to make someone else happy, whether it's their parents or their spouse or their friends. But they never want to embrace the faith, they never want to strive to enter through the narrow door. Being around church and owning a Bible does not mean that you are saved. Showing up at church on Easter and Christmas (or even every Sunday), or getting baptized or married at a church, even being a member of a church, does not mean that you have a relationship with God. You are not saved by having family members who are serious about their faith, nor by being involved in a Christian culture or a ministry. You must own your faith. Be careful about having an attitude of presumption and entitlement – don't presume that you'll be saved or entitled to heaven because of who you are or who you are associated with.

John 17:3 – *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* Jesus said that He is the door! Enter through Him and don’t assume that you can enter in after you die if you never entered in when you were alive; the door will be shut. Come to faith in Christ now, let Him gather you under His wings to protect and save you. With the Psalmist in Psalm 61:4 you can confidently declare, *“Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of Your wings!”* Amen.

#### Benediction

Colossians 2:13-14 - *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”*