

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 13:22-30, 31-35 **“Eyes On The Prize”**

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Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org

“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 13:22-35 "EYES ON THE PRIZE"

Who Are The True People Of God? Jerusalem In Ruins

A) v.22 TRAVEL REPORT TOWARDS JERUSALEM (Begins At 9:51 //17:11, 18:31, 19:28,41).

22 He (i.e. Jesus) went **on his way** through towns and villages, teaching, and journeying toward **Jerusalem**.
Prophet On The Way To Death

B) vv.23-35 TWO EXAMPLES OF TEACHING ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM.

Lukan Construction From Sources, Catchwords

1) vv.23-30 First Dialog: Question And Answer: Who Will Be Saved? Which Side Is Jesus On?

Saved = Not Miss Opportunity To Enter Kingdom

a) v.23a Question On Salvation From The Crowd. Mishna San. 10:1 (Most), 4 Ezra 7:47, 8:1-3, 9:15 (Few)

23 And some one said to him, "**Lord**, will those who are being saved be few?" Speculative? 1st Century Judaism
See 10:29, 11:45, 12:13, 41, 13:1 For Other Questions

b) vv.23b-30 Jesus' Answer: Prophetic Warnings About Exclusion. Jesus Refuses Speculation

1 AND HE SAID TO THEM, Will Saved Be *You*? Narrow/Hard/Unpopular, Mt. 7:13-14, Jn. 10:1-2, 7

24 "Strive (keep agonizing) to enter by the narrow door; Not Others But *You*, Command/ Now/Vigorous Effort!

1) Command *For* many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Mt. 25:10-12, Reason "For"/ Warning Too Late
Phil. 2:12-13, Narrow Door → Shut Door, Exclusion: 2 Reasons

25 2a When once the **householder** has risen up and shut the door, Mt. 7:22-23, 25:10-12 (Q), There Is A Time Limit

2) Explanation you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, '**Lord**, open to us.' i.d. as *Lord*, Request

b He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' No Personal Response Or Relationship

26 a' Then you will begin to say, Birth/Heritage/Culture/Association Not Automatic

'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' 7:36, 11:37, Ascribed Status/ Empty

27 b' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; He Is Judge, No Relationship

depart from me, '*all you workers of iniquity!*' No Change In Behavior: Ps. 6:8-9, Lk. 6:47

3) Consequences 3:8, 6:24-26, 10:13-15, 11:42-52, 16:9-13, Exposure Not Enough, Must Respond!

28 3a' There you will weep and gnash your teeth, Sorrow + Anger, Hell As Regret/ Miss Opportunity

when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and *all* the prophets Jews, Visual Image Of The Faithful

in the kingdom of God 3:8, 16:9-31

b and you yourselves thrust out. Mt. 8:11-12, Some Jews Deliberately Excluded From Kingdom

29 a' And men will come from east and west, *and from north and south*, (L), Surprise! Pilgrimage Of Gentiles!

and sit (recline) at table in the kingdom of God. Not Know In Flesh, Banquet/ God As Host, Is. 25:6-8

30 b' **And behold**, Mt. 19:30, 20:16, Mk. 10:31, Climax

some are last who will be first, and *some* are first who will be last." a-b//b'-a', Many Surprises At End!

Reversal Of Expectations About Who God Values, Lk. 12:35-59

Genre = Prophet's Confrontation With A King, Philosopher With A Tyrant

2) vv.31-35 Second Dialog: Warning And Answer: The Resolve Of Jesus, His Divine Destiny.

Herod Killed John The Baptist (3:18-20, 9:9), Galileans 13:1

a) v.31 Jesus Is Warned By A Pharisee. Assumes Self-Preservation As Jesus' Motive

31 At *that very hour* some Pharisees came, and said to him, 13:31-33 Only In Luke (L), Time Link

1a) Command "Get away from here,

for Herod wants to kill you." Test? Will Not Quit, Jesus Has Stirred Resistance

For Jesus Disturbs The Status Quo, Call To Lay Low!

b) vv.32-35 Jesus' Answer: Headed For Confrontation/ Lament Over The City.

Ministry Described: Deliverance/Healing/Prophetic Death

32 1 AND HE SAID TO THEM, Alternative: a(v.32)- b (v.33)// b' (v.34)-a' (v.35)

1b) Command "Go and tell that fox, 7:28, Fearless: Small Sly Predator Next To Lion! Ezek. 13:4

'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, Quick Succession, 3 Days = Short Time

and the third day I finish my course (I am brought to fulfillment). 12:50, No Fear, Herod Not Block Finish

2) Explanation Power(v.32) → No Power (v.33), Prophet/Agent Ready To Suffer

33 2 Nevertheless I must go **on my way** today and tomorrow and the day following; //9:22, 44, 3 Days = Complete

Time Short for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from **Jerusalem**.' 12:50, Linked By *Jerusalem*, Perish

Jer. 26:20-23, 1 Chr. 24:20-22, Destiny ("Must/ Cannot")

//Mt. 23:37-39 (Q), 21:35, Sad State Of Unrepentant Nation

34 3a O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! 11:49, Lament

3) Consequences b How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings,

and you would not! Nation Not Respond, Female Image: Ps. 17:8, Dt. 32:11, Ps. 91:4

35 a' **Behold**, your **house** is forsaken to you. Lament, Conditional Threat : Fall Of Jerusalem (70AD)?, Jer. 22:5

b' **And I tell you**, you will not see me *until* you say, Mt. 21:9, Will Not See Him Till The End

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the **Lord**!'" Answer To v.23! Ps. 118:26, 19:38

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 13:22-30, 31-35

This unit is introduced by the first travel summary since 9:51, “When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Inclusions are *on his(my) way* (v.22 // v.33), *Jerusalem* (v.22 // v.33b), *householder/house* (v.25a // v.35), *Lord* (v.23 // v.35b). The unit consists of a travel report (A. v.22) and two teaching blocks (B1. vv.23-30, B2. vv.31-35). Catchwords that move the thought along include a group of 3's (*Jerusalem* [vv.22, 33, 34 (2 for emphasis)], *Lord* [vv.23, 25b, 35b), *door* [vv.24a, 25a,b], *I tell you* [vv.24b, 27a, 35b], *prophet(s)* [vv.28b, 33b, 34a], and *and behold* [vv. 30a, 32b, 35a]) and a group of 2's (*all* [vv.27b, 28b], *kingdom of God* [vv.28b, 29b], *today, tomorrow, third day* [vv.32b, 33a]). A question in v.23a leads to a three-part answer in vv.23b-30 starting with *And he said to them* (v.23b). A warning in v.31 leads to a three-part reply in vv.32-35, again starting with *And he said to them* (v.32a).

Luke's hand is clear in creating the surface structure, in material unique to his gospel (vv.22-24, vv.31-33), in his editing and rearrangement of Q materials scattered in Matthew (7:13-14, 25:10b-12, 7:22-23, 25:41, 8:11-12, 19:30), and in a close replication of Matthew 23:37-39 to climax the unit in vv.34-35. The question-and-answer format (B1. vv.23-30) and the threat-and-response format (B1. vv.31-35) are his, as is the journey motif. All who enter the narrow door are welcomed into the household and seated at the banquet; all who procrastinate and count on association rather than the efforts of discipleship as shown in ethical living (*workers of iniquity*) are excluded. As he journeys, Jesus continues his exorcisms, healing, and teaching as windows into the new world (v.32b). He will not be diverted from his coming death in the holy city (v.33). Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (v.34a), made all the more tragic by their rejection of his care (v.34b), leads to judgment, “Behold, your house is forsaken for you,” a verdict not to be lifted until they turn and welcome him with Ps. 118:26, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Grace rejected is judgment begun. How God's people treat the divine agent is how they will be treated.

Verse 22 shows who leads the way, what happens, and the destination, “He went on his way through town and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.” A question on a debated topic is posed, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” Will many Jews find themselves in the kingdom when it comes, or only a few?” But Jesus is not distracted by speculation. The question is not, *Will they be few?* but *Will one of them be you?* The door into the household is narrow, and - with all that opposes us- takes great energy to enter, so do it now because the opportunity will not last. Grace is not opposed to effort but to earning. We must fully cooperate with the energies of God's drawing power. To latecomers who knock and demand, “Lord, open to us!” the reply is, “I do not know *where you come from.*” To procrastinate is to continue a foreign lifestyle, thus, “depart from me, *all you workers of iniquity.*” The contrast with the patriarchs and prophets will be the cause of great regret. Even more, non-Jews will enter from all four compass points, thus anger, “We are left out, and our enemies are included!” Many are the surprises when some of the last are first and some of the first last. To be associated through lineage, proximity or fellowship is not enough. The kingdom is for those who energetically respond to God's grace and press in. Jesus is the householder, the narrow door, and the prophet who knows and speaks the future.

The second teaching block begins with a sober warning from the Pharisees, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you” (v.31), but he will not be intimidated or diverted. A message is sent back to the fox (e.g. pipsqueak!) that Jesus continues under current plans (i.e. his liberation ministry of casting out demons and healing) until it all comes to fulfillment. The journey to Jerusalem will climax in his self-prophesied death. He laments the resistance of the city that rejects God's affections to its demise. They would not find shelter under his wings. God leaves them to their chosen path, “...your house is forsaken for you.” Only when welcomed will they see him and his blessing again.

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

“Strive to enter by the narrow door....”

It requires effort, a goal, and it’s not for crowds.

LUKE 13:24

It seems everyone’s writing purpose and mission statements these days. You find them on letterheads, posted in lobbies of businesses and hospitals, even on banners like the ones we’re unveiling each week. One hears quotes like, “Aim at nothing, and you’ll hit it every time.” Or, “To fail to plan is to plan to fail.” One of my favorites is Socrates’ “The unexamined life is not worth living.” In a world with a bewildering number of options, a mission and vision statement aims at focus and clarity. It gives you reason to say Yes to some things, No to others. Left to its own, life quickly loses focus and dissolves into many duties with little direction and even less a sense of destiny. The American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote:

“I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving: To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it- but we *must sail*, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.”¹

Scattered throughout the gospels are statements which serve as summaries of Jesus’ mission. One from John is built on a stark contrast, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; *I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.*”² Jesus and Satan have radically differing agendas: *steal, kill, and destroy* versus *abundant life*, so choose. If we do life alone, it goes downhill under the weight of sin and the allure of evil; do life with Jesus and the outcome is life-giving because he’s a warrior against the enemy of our souls; he fights to give us life.

¹ “Keep Moving,” *PreachingToday.com*.

² John 10:10.

Another is from Mark, “For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”³ Jesus served every day and serves us most fully in paying the price of our ransom, something we could not do because we are helpless in our bondage.⁴ Or how about the triple focus of the mission statement of verse 32: “Behold,” said Jesus, “I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course... for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”⁵ Note the warfare mindset and the therapeutic approach to the sick. It’s Dr. Jesus or Jesus the Ghostbuster depending on what’s needed. Dark forces are banished; people are made whole. Something is removed, something restored, and only he knows which people need, what combination in what proportion because in the moment it was revealed to him. He sees us and within each.

Through the will of the Father and the energies of the Spirit people were made free and whole by a Jesus who offered a new quality of relationship with the God of Israel, the One they thought they knew. When people experienced freedom from torment and healing from illness and the ring of truth in his words and the release of forgiveness which took away guilt and fear, they were- in that moment- given a foretaste of the Father’s kingdom, a gulp of living water and a new vision of what life is like when God rules at ground level, and to turn and trust that new reality is what it means to *repent and believe*. Not to trust the new reality in Jesus and not use all that’s in me to enter it is what leaves people outside. In Jesus’ presence all had an opportunity; not all responded. Some entered the narrow door; others kept looking for a broader, easier, less demanding, more conventional path. Some Jesus drew to himself, some he repelled; some loved him, others loathed him; and some were foolish enough to think casual association was enough, “Oh, I went to one of his concerts, even got the T-shirt” without ever become a true fan and follower.

Here’s what it means. During his three or so years of public ministry, Jesus

³ Mark 10:45.

⁴ The most offensive doctrine for moderns who think self-esteem and self-help are the cure is Original Sin because of its blunt declarations, “Article VII, Of Original or Birth Sin: Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually” (*BOD 2012*, 65).

⁵ Luke 13:32b.

burst on the scene as a champion and liberator of many Jews and a few Gentiles, so no one could say the kingdom was only for ethnic insiders. He frees from demonic evil those so compromised, from disease all the ill who managed to get near him- and sometimes even at a distance, from the common burden of sin through forgiveness, and finally at the end of his life engages our greatest enemy, death itself, which he enters freely on Friday and then slips out of its iron grip through a mighty, bodily resurrection on Easter.⁶ His work is comprehensive and aims at the whole person.

The mission is clear; Jesus has come for the liberation of human beings from all that grinds us down and hampers our original purpose of loving God and one another at full capacity. All who will may be restored to God now and comprehensively later on. The bad news is that as Jesus finds us we are all deeply diminished and horribly twisted and tragically distorted and fatally compromised at every level; nothing about us is unaffected, and we are not innocent victims but eventually full cooperators with all that's wrong. But we are to be made genuinely human again with marvelous new powers. You will one day be a *whole new you with a fresh resurrection body*, and the seed of the new you is *now*. Jesus is a preview of coming attractions because a new world is already on the way to us from God's future. But that liberation requires our full participation, as the rest of today's story makes clear. Jesus was grieved by the continuous resistance of his people. You can hear it, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you." He lamented how they killed the prophets and would soon kill him. They are rebellious chicks who will not come under the covering of their mother's wings when a storm is at hand. All they needed was him, but they would not respond.

We cannot save ourselves by our works, but neither will God without our efforts. We cannot put God is our debt by anything we do, but God's energies of love are meant to energize and enable our responsiveness across the whole of life, just as one tuning fork, when struck, sets up a sympathetic tone in another held near it. It's a narrow door, warned Jesus, and it requires that we strive, even agonize, to enter while it's open. Salvation is not a thing or a possession; it's a healed relationship with the One who made us, and for relationships to work- as we all know, both parties must lean into one another, and one must initiate the offer.

⁶ For a defense of Jesus' embodied resurrection and transformed physicality, see N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014), Chapter 3, "Can A Scientist Believe In The Resurrection?" 41-63.

God makes the first move and gives full measure, so there's no doubt about God's part as demonstrated in the faithfulness of Jesus. We are wanted; we are sought; we're worth dying for. What's in question is our responsiveness, our willingness to quit saying No and start saying Yes, what the Bible terms *faith*, which is best understood as *trust based on the trustworthiness of the other party*, and this God is utterly trustworthy; not to trust him is an error and insult in the extreme. Unbelief and skepticism- when it comes to God's character, is a serious problem, and at some point you may hear a voice, "What more can I do than I've already done? Is a crucified and risen Jesus not enough? Is my best not enough?" How will you answer that? You will not know who you are and what you are for apart from him.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

A. On The Way To Jerusalem (v.22).

Jesus was a man in motion, following the Father's will and the Holy Spirit's guidance day by day with a sense of destiny. He was consumed by a new world that was breaking in through his words and deeds. He left in his wake people made whole. He was God's last call to his own people to give up their destructive national and political agenda for a different future, which was to be a light and blessing to the nations. Which meant that while the early ministry of Jesus was focused in Galilee, the focus at some point had to be Jerusalem, not the villages of the north but the great city of David, the place where the Temple was, the center of national identity. And so in verse 22 Luke gives us an interim travel report, "Jesus went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying *towards Jerusalem*." Headed to the big city for the showdown, but not ignoring people along the way. Jesus worked off a heavenly clock and so he, as someone said, "made haste slowly." Because he was obedient, he was always at the right place at the right time. His was the most beautiful life ever lived, in perfect harmony with the members of the godhead with whom he lived in constant dependence, the Father who sent him and the Spirit who empowered him. No rushing about; his was the pace of walking and talking, village hospitality and time to tend to tormented souls and broken bodies. The ultimate people person, God at ground level, taking questions and giving surprising answers.

B1. Theological Speculation And Personal Challenge (vv.23-30).

In its core doctrines the church does not try to say everything; only the essentials are defined. A healed relationship with God is only through Jesus Christ, and even the

ability to trust him is itself is a gift of God’s grace that requires an active, lifelong response. But the doctrine of salvation does not answer the question as to whether many or few will be saved. Universalism, the belief that all will be saved, is not a biblical option. Neither is the option in the other extreme direction that all will be lost; some will be saved. But as to the relative proportions the church has not defined them, and the main reason is that Scripture does not; the second reason being it’s still an open issue. Decisions are still being made, and all who respond are the elect. But that does not keep people, then or now, from asking questions like the one in verse 23, “And some one said to him, ‘Lord, will those who are being saved be few?’”

There was a lively debate in Jesus day about the matter. One opinion was stated as follows, “The Most High made this world for the sake of the many, but the world to come for the sake of the few.”⁷ Just like today, this or that group claimed they were the saved and that those who disagreed with them were lost. Some rabbis taught that only a few of God’s people would enjoy heaven immediately after death with the rest waiting in the abode of the dead until the final resurrection when they too would join the blessed in the age to come.⁸ A first and second string approach; all Jews will be saved, but the good ones get to go first. In our day it takes the form of questions like, “What about the people who never heard of Jesus? Or sometimes, “What is the minimum requirement for heaven?”

There are some questions Jesus refused to answer, and this is one of them. The issue is not the theoretical one of *Who* will be saved? but the pressing and personal one of, Will *you* be saved? Thus, the question, ‘Will the saved be *few*?’ has become, ‘Will the saved be *you*?’⁹ With Jesus the issue very quickly went from theological speculation about proportions to prophetic and personal confrontation. Jesus looked at the questioner and said, “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, *I tell you*, will seek to enter and will not be able.” A pointed invitation and a sober warning.

A narrow door is not for crowds but one at a time. To strive and agonize for the salvation of one’s soul is not a selfish thing because it’s the only thing that will lead you truly beyond yourself. C.S. Lewis wrote, “If you read history you will find

⁷ 4 Ezra 8:1.

⁸ F.W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton Pub., 1976), 15.

⁹ Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 381.

that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”¹⁰ It is those who are most concerned about heaven and the kingdom that are most useful here. It is they who know what the real and ultimate issues. It is they who feed the poor and clothe the naked and visit the prisoner and work against injustice. Walter Wangerin put it well, “Faith is work. It is a struggle. You must struggle with all your heart... And on the way, God will ambush you.”¹¹ This is not the same as trying to be saved by doing good works with which I can then bargain with God. But works are not the same as effort, and while we are not saved by our works, neither are we saved without our efforts. Grace is the energy to seek after God. We must cooperate with what God is doing in and for us; grace is the magnetic divine energy that enables us to strive to fulfill the good commands of God. The Puritan William Perkins wrote:

“The man who would stand in the favour of God and be saved, must do four things: first, humble himself before God; second, believe in Christ; third, repent of his sins; *fourth*, (and this is the one most neglected in our day) *perform new obedience to God.*”¹²

There is no one responsible for you that way you are. I will not be held accountable whether you spend eternity with or apart from God. I’m accountable to teach the Scriptures, celebrate the sacraments, strive to lead a life which adorns the gospel, and to press as deeply into the faith as God will let me. But I am not accountable for your destiny, only my own. The door is so narrow we go through it one at a time. That is why we each must each strive to enter by the narrow door, because the time is coming, warned Jesus, when many will seek to enter and will not be able. They’ve procrastinated and are now excluded. In Chester, England an inscription on the cathedral clock reads:

“When, as a child, I laughed and wept, Time crept.
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked, Time walked.
When I became a full-grown man, Time ran.

¹⁰ J.S. Hewett ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1988), 175.

¹¹ “Surprised by Faith,” PreachingToday.com.

¹² R. Kent Hughes, *1001 Great Stories* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1998), 365.

And later, as I older grew, Time flew.
Soon I shall find, while traveling on, Time gone.
Will Christ have saved my soul by then? Amen.”¹³

A time will come when time is up, the door closed. And outside will be many *cultural* Christians. They knew to call Jesus *Lord* as the Creed says; the grace of good theology was theirs. They ate and drank in his presence at the Lord’s Supper; sacramental grace was theirs. They heard his Word from the pulpit; the grace of biblical instruction was theirs. They were acquainted with him through multiple channels. Attending church was part of the family inheritance, like grandmother’s china or which political party they prefer or whether they pull for Clemson or Carolina, and about as important. But Jesus Christ and their own salvation has never become a matter of urgency. They sing “Amazing Grace” but have never been awakened; it’s a song about someone else. The light that is all around them has never penetrated deep enough to illumine their own soul. It can wait, or it’s already taken care of by outward observances, or surely God would not reject someone as decent and not-so-bad-as-others as I am. After all, I’m a good American, and- as everyone knows, ours is a Christian country, so I’m in. We’re insiders to the church; we heard him teach, ate at his table. When I ask someone if they’re a Christ-follower, and they tell me the religious history of their family, how great a Christian grandmother was, and how their family gave the land for Slippery-Slope Methodist back in the 1800's, I know they’re lost, and worst yet don’t know it because they’re trusting in the wrong stuff. Were they to die tonight and knock on the door, “Lord, let us in,” they would hear just what Jesus said to the spiritual floaters of his day, “I do not know where you come from.” Are you his follower? Or are you lost and unconverted in the church, trusting to get by on the family plan or someone else’s experience.

But delay is a form of denial. Twice for emphasis Jesus responds to their empty religious assertions with rejection, “I do not know where you come from,” which paraphrased means, “We never had a relationship.” Religious heritage? Yes. Ritual? Yes. Community respectability? Yes. Denominational affiliation? Yes, but no saving relationship, no spiritual passion that caused you to strive to enter by the narrow door. No love for Jesus Christ which constrained and directed your life. No gratitude for all he did; no willingness to lay down my life. They never changed, and so he says with insight, “Depart from me, *all you workers of iniquity.*”

¹³ Robert Backhouse, *The Ultimate Speaker’s Handbook* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1997), 138.

Those are not words you want to hear. There was no repentance, just a religious veneer hiding a life of rebellion against God. The only convincing proof of faith in Jesus Christ is a changed life, one filled with spiritual passion and a hunger for more. There's no carbon between the roll books of a United Methodist Church and the Lamb's Book of Life, and there are many more names on the former than in the latter. To score a field goal the kicker must place the ball between the *narrow* uprights of the goal post; to successfully land an airliner, the pilot must put the plane down on the *narrows* of the runway, you drive down a *narrow* lane of highway every day; you live within the *narrow* limits of your finances; *narrow* is nothing new to us, and to be saved and enter God's kingdom we must strive by the energy God provides to enter a *narrow* door which will one day be shut.

The easy way and the broad, popular way are not God's way. I don't say this because I'm superior or have it all together; I don't. I'm frankly embarrassed by how much I know and how little it's changed my insides and deep desires. Every day I wish I was a better man. I say these things because Jesus said this is how it is and in the end my job is not to please you but to make absolutely sure your blood is not on my hands. I must continue to strive to agonize to endeavor to be utterly spent to enter the narrow door because of the forces- internal and external- that are arrayed against me and seeking to divert me and block my path. Some of your family members are not going to be there. Some who sit beside you in church will find themselves too late on the wrong side of the narrow door. Your husband or wife or child may not be there. Johnny Cash is wrong; *the circle will be broken* because the door is so narrow we enter one at a time, not as families. No one gets into the new world on momma's faith or daddy's relationship with Jesus or giving a stained glass window or the land your granddaddy gave the church or that you attended a Methodist college or married a believer. One question counts: Do you strive to follow him with all that's in you?

Three devils had a chat with Satan about hatching a plot how to ruin the human family. The first said, "Why don't we try and make them believe there's no God?"

"No good," said Satan. "All they have to do is look at the beautiful world, and they can't help but believe a creator God is responsible for it all."

"Why don't we make them believe hell does not exist," offered the second.

"No good either," said Satan, "Too many of them are living in hell as it is."

"Well," said the third, "Why don't we convince them there's no hurry?"

"There," said Satan, "you've hit my best strategy, "Lull them into the

complacency of procrastination, and they'll be ours forever."¹⁴

All of us can look back over our lives and identify missed opportunities. The name for this experience is *regret*, and it is a capacity of the soul that with grace enables change. Having missed out once, we take the next opportunity that comes along much more seriously. But when people are overwhelmed by regret because options are at an end, they are paralyzed; the enormity of what they've missed freezes them. That is precisely how Jesus describes the first taste of judgment, as the pain of regret with no opportunity for change; they are frozen in grief and anger, "There you will weep (grief) and gnash your teeth (anger), when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Gentiles stream in from all four corners to take their places in God's banquet hall. You see it all as an outsider and cannot participate.

Jesus used the most vivid imagery at his disposal to awaken people, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able because the door will be shut." This easy, broad, casual, polite, nice, shallow, southern, sweet-Jesus social, clubby folk religion in which many of us were raised has little to do with the difficult, narrow, focused, uncompromising and deeply demanding life of which Jesus spoke. And I'm sorry if you've believed the other way for decades. These are not my words; these are my feeble explanations of his words. And if they sober us both, that is their intent.

It will also be a place of surprise as the standards of this world are turned upside down, "And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." That waitress whose name you never bothered to find out may be far ahead of you in love. Each day you may ignore people whom God counts of great worth. Our ideas about who and what is important are guaranteed to be upended. John Newton, former slave trader and author of "Amazing Grace," wrote:

"When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders there. The first wonder will be to see many there whom I did not expect to see; the second wonder will be to miss many people whom I did expect to see; the third and greatest of all will be to find myself there."¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁵ Idem.

So while speculation may be intellectually interesting, “Lord, will those who are being saved be few?” Jesus never lets us get away with keeping life’s ultimate issue at an intellectual arm’s length. It is not about *others* but *us*, not *them* but *me*. My destiny hangs in the balance, and until some of that urgency works its way into your heart, I do not see how you become or remain a follower of the Jesus who said, “You, the one who asked the question. Strive to enter by the narrow door....”

B2. The Boldness And Compassion Of Jesus (vv.31-35)

Jesus knew precisely where he was going; he was going to die in Jerusalem as God’s last word to Israel. It’s what God’s people did to prophets. It is unlikely the Pharisees had any real concern for his welfare. The emphasis in verse 31 is to be placed on the “Get away from here,” and not on the reason offered, “for Herod wants to kill you.” Since when were they messengers of the government? But if that is their chosen role, then Jesus sends a hot message back, “Go and tell that fox....”

The message of what follows in verses 32 and 33 is a paradox. Why would the one who had power from above “cast out demons” and “perform cures” deliberately walk into a death trap? Why use power to rescue others but not the same to protect himself? Because, I think, at some point to show love you must give up power. The parent who refuses to let their child leave does not love them. The spouse who continually tries to control their partner does not love them. The heart of Jesus yearns to gather people to himself as a hen gathers chicks under her wings during a storm. That Jesus would use such a maternal image to speak of God’s love is an insight that while God is Father, this love is also like the best of mother love which wants to establish close contact and protect. It allows our rebellion, even our rejection and hatred, and does not turn away from the consequences, even if it means a cross. It wasn’t nails that held him there on Good Friday, it was a love willing to be abused and shamed and killed by our freedom. Jesus invites but does not control, and one day he will reveal what we’ve done with his love. Hell, as odd as it sounds, is the best God can do for some folk since he will not coerce any to respond.

As I read Jesus’ lament over the holy city, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...” I wondered what he would say to us, “O Greenwood, Greenwood...” We are so used to thinking of salvation in individual terms we forget Jesus also addressed towns and villages, even large cities like Jerusalem with his call to repentance. Places have a character and a spiritual climate. There is a hidden geography of the Spirit. How many times has Christ come to Greenwood offering revival, and the town turned him

away? I can find in our history no time of a widespread spiritual awakening. A quiver here, a flame there, but no deep shaking and no abiding fire.

This not an attack on your home; the same could be said of Cheraw or Charleston or Columbia. But this is the city in which I preach and serve, and I intend to work for the good of this place. May God break our hearts over the spiritual hardness of this city, the pride and the sloth and the lack of love and the love of status. We have many churches, but few growing. Many sermons, few converts. A thin veneer of religiosity here, but little fear of God. We are spiritually asleep and frittering away the moral and spiritual capital we've inherited. Perhaps not as far gone as Jerusalem, but would it not be a frightening thing to hear Jesus say of us, "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.'" This is both a word of judgment and of hope. For now the house is forsaken; God has withdrawn to see if anyone notices. But the day may come when he's welcomed back again. Most all judgments in the Bible are contingent on our response, announced as if they were already here, but then a back door is left ajar.

CONCLUSION

The narrow door of opportunity does not only close for individuals, as we earlier read, but also for cities, as we read in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. I often ask, "Lord, what are you up to?" and all I hear is, "Wait and see." I want to be here when God breaks the principalities and powers over this city and we live under an open heaven. I want to be here when a hundred pastors gather for prayer and fasting. I want to be here when the crime rate plummets and newspaper reporters rush from church to church to keep up with all that's happening. I want to be here when the doctors come to the pastors and say, "Come and pray for my patients." I want to be here when the racial barriers between churches come down. I want to be here when the shackled-up come to the church for marriage by the droves because God has spoken to them to honor one another, and when divorces are rare because churches know how to heal broken homes. To be here when Greenwood cries out, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." I am no longer a young preacher with a long career ahead. I'll be sixty-one next month, and there's an ache in my heart to see God withdraw his judgments and bless his people. *Strive to enter by the narrow door.* It's the only one there is.

APPENDIX 1: THE SURFACE STRUCTURE OF LUKE 13:22-35

A. v.22 TRAVEL REPORT ON JOURNEY TOWARDS JERUSALEM.

on his way, Jerusalem

B. vv.23-25 TWO EXAMPLES OF TEACHING ON THE WAY.

Lord

1. vv.23-30 First Dialog: Question and Answer, Who Will Be Saved?

a. v.23a Question From The Crowd

b. vv.23b-30 Jesus Answer: Prophetic Warnings On Inclusion & Exclusion

- 1) vv.23b-24 Command: Enter the narrow door
“AND HE SAID TO THEM”
- 2) vv.25-27 Explanation: Rejection when the door is shut
Time short
- 3) vv.28-30 Consequences: Observing the banquet and guests as outsiders

2. vv.31-35 Second Dialog: Warning And Answer, Jesus’ Resolve, Divine Destiny.

a. v.31 Jesus Warned By A Pharisee Of Herod’s Murderous Intent

b. vv.32-35 Jesus’ Answer: Headed For Confrontation/ Lament Over City

- 1. v.32 Command to go and tell Herod
“AND HE SAID TO THEM”
- 2. v.33 Explanation: Necessity of the way to Jerusalem on my way/ Jerusalem
Time Short
- 3. vv.34-35 Consequences: Lament over Jerusalem and conditional prophecy Lord

Use of 3's

Use of 2's

Jerusalem	vv.22, 33, 34 (2zx)	all (vv.27b, 28b)
Lord	vv.23, 25b, 35b	kingdom of God (vv.28b, 29b)
door	v.24a, 25a, b	on my (his) way (vv. 22, 33a)
I tell you	v.24b, 27a, 35b	today, tomorrow, third day (vv.32b, 33a)
prophet(s)	v.28b, 33b, 34a	
and behold	v.30a, 32b, 35a	

APPENDIX 2: SOURCE ANALYSIS OF LUKE 13:22-35

Luke	Source Analysis	Luke's Editorial Intent
13:22	Transition verse = Luke the editor (L) // 9:51, 13:22, 17:11, 18:31, 19:28	Progress towards Jerusalem is marked
13:23	Question from Luke (L), <i>few</i> from Q (Mt. 7:14)	Question + Answer Format (Common in Ls) Raise disputed salvation question among rabbis
13:24	Luke (L) "And he said to them," //v.32a "narrow gate" (Mt 7:13). Luke (L) "Strive to enter... for many , I tell you, will seek to enter and not be able"	Editorial introduction Q source (two ways omitted, implied) Effort required, limited time, warning
13:25	Luke (L) "When once the householder has risen up... you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door.... will answer you... where you come from.... all... workers of iniquity" "door was shut.... Lord, open to us... But he replied... I do not know" (Mt.25:10b-12)	Jesus is the head of his household awaiting travelers Marriage setting omitted Not recognize their origin, <i>where from</i>
13:26-27	Luke (L) "Then you will begin to stand outside... We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.... But he will say, 'I tell you... where you came from' "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (Mt. 7:22-23)	Form of excuses retained, but Matthew's signs of power are omitted. Luke shifts to relationship and association as insufficient for kingdom entry. Origin again emphasized <i>where you came from</i> .
13:28	Luke (L), emphasis on <i>all</i> , "when you see... and all the prophets... and you yourselves thrust out" "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob... thrown into outer darkness... will weep and gnash their teeth" (Mt. 8:11-12)	Results of lack of response. Great regret over not being welcomed into the company of the greats.
13:29	Luke (L), "and from north and south"	All compass points, universal draw towards Jesus.
13:30	Luke (L), "And behold, last/first... first/last" (traditional order reversed) "But many that are first will be last, and the last first" (Mt. 19:30, Mk. 10:31)	"Behold" for emphasis, structure. Brought in for a-b//a'-b' balance
13:31-33	Luke (L) only, no parallel	Parallel to v.23a, shows Jesus courage and destiny
13:34-35	Nearly exact quotation of Matthew 23:37-39 (Q), "and desolate... for" omitted	Climax, lament over Jerusalem

The overall literary form and surface structure of vv.22-35 is a Lucan creation consisting of a travel report (v.22) followed by two teaching episodes (vv.23-30, vv.31-35). Both the question and answer format (vv.23-30) and the threat and answer format (vv.31-35) are his creation, each with three parts in the answers. Q material found scattered in Matthew (7:13-14, 25:10b-12, 7:22-23, 8:11-12, 19:30//20:16) is heavily edited. The opportunity to enter the kingdom through the narrow door is not forever. Making your case on association is not sufficient; you must repent and follow Jesus. The call is universal and open to all. All who respond will be saved. Will you? The price is high.