

Luke Through Lent - Hard Journey
March 13, 2022 - Luke 13:22-35
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Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and it's already been a fair while.
We were first told he was on his way to Jerusalem in chapter 9:51.

Lots has happened already on this journey and our passage today finds him dealing with a very interesting question.

Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?
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Before we deal with Luke telling us what Jesus says about this, I want you to reflect on that question in today's world.

How do we deal with this question today?
Who actually asks, who's going to be saved?
Who asks that anymore?
Where is the thinking of the world up to in the 21st century?

As I reflect on conversations I've had and articles and books I've read, movies I've seen and shows I've watched, here's where I think the world probably is.

There are some who still have a general belief in God, and they have this idea that it's all about the scales of justice.
If I'm good enough, that outweighs the bad things I do,
and therefore on balance I get to go to heaven, and that's probably a good thing.

There are others who ascribe to the total benevolence of God and that everyone will be saved in the end because God is love. You everyone goes to heaven becomes an angel and gets wings.

And then there are those who believe that death is the end. We're just bits of carbon and that's all that we'll end up being. Finito.

I've got no valid evidence for this, but I guesstimate that across the western world today, it's maybe a third in each category.

But apart from those generalisations, I have a sense that this question isn't actually on people's minds anyway.

The thought of 'am I going to be saved' or 'who is going to be saved' is simply not on the mind of many people.

And I think the reason for this, is that sin, wrong-doing, simply isn't taken seriously any more, unless you're talking about certain behaviours like child sexual abuse, murder, domestic violence or discrimination of any sort; or you're talking about people like Putin, or Xi Jinping, or the Taliban, or Kim Jong-un. With these... **then** the moral compass is allowed to come into effect, in full force.

But as an ordinary person reflects on an ordinary life, I think sin is discounted either as non-existent or as inconsequential.

Being saved doesn't come into people's minds because the mindset is - what could I possibly need to be saved from?

I don't want to discount that there are also many people for whom there is an overwhelming feeling of condemnation and despair because they are very aware of their shortcomings and desperately worry that they are not good enough, and never will be good enough. And that is sad, because they keep trying to **be** good enough, and the truth is that none of us can ever be good enough.

If you're here this morning, or listening online and you resonate with one or more of these scenarios, can I say right now, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is very very good news, and it's very good news for you.

Because the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, takes all of this very seriously and also actually lays it out sensibly.

In fact, how Jesus and Christianity deals with this very fundamental and human dilemma is the most satisfying I have found amongst all aspects of world thinking or philosophy or psychology, religion and theology.

You see Jesus knows and says that the human dilemma is a moral one. And Christianity faces the very real fact that this moral dilemma is something we will not, and indeed cannot, deal with by our selves.

It takes seriously that there is a dilemma in the human heart about purpose and meaning and ethics, and morality, and it has answers to the why, what and how of human life.

The complexity of the human condition is taken seriously in Christianity.

It's not an insult to intelligence, in fact it's an acknowledgement of human intelligence in such a way that gives it credibility and status.

Believing that we are nothing more than carbon gives us no status at all. And that is simply unacceptable in the mind of our Creator.

The gospel acknowledges that there is a yearning within all of us to **be** what we know we can't be. And God meets us in that yearning, by coming to us in Jesus Christ, and being what we are unable to be, and doing what we are unable to do.

He lived a life without blemish, which we couldn't do, and died a death of sacrifice, which we couldn't do, and rose from the dead in victory, which we couldn't do.

And even though we couldn't do any of it because of our default towards wrongdoing and selfishness, we get the benefit of him doing it in our place.

In this good news that christianity has, God acknowledges the human dilemma and comes to fix it himself because he knows that we can't.

Now if this piques your curiosity in even the slightest way, please don't ignore it.

Investigate it, ask questions, talk to somebody who's got a personal experience of it.

And can I boldly say, that if pride is stopping you, please name it as that, and ask yourself why. And if you can't give a reasonable answer to why you should hold on to your pride, then let it go and check out this other way.

Because there's plenty of people who know this other way, and that it's truly a better way.

So let's see how Jesus answers the question he's asked - Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?

Interestingly, Jesus doesn't answer straight away.

Instead, as he does often, he turns the question around, from being a general one about the number of people, to a personal one.

He says.... "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many will try to enter and will not be able to.

The important question isn't how **many** will be saved, but will **you** be saved.

You see, you can't take entry into the kingdom for granted. The way of entry is narrow.

Now narrow-mindedness isn't hailed as something positive is it?

And quite often Christianity is ridiculed as being narrow-minded.

After all, one of our distinctives is the claim that Jesus is unique. People don't like that we set him as the limit, the only one who enables us to be in relationship with God.

And yet people are quite accepting of limits in other areas of life.

There are borders all over the place, and we set restrictions on who can cross borders. We have visa requirements and passport requirements, don't we.

Yet when we read that the entrance to God's kingdom is narrow, it's worrying. As if God has no right to set limits.

Enter by the narrow door.

But Jesus goes on to explain further what makes the door narrow.

He says "Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.'"

What he's saying is that the door is narrow because time is running out.

I've got an illustration here from a movie I like a lot. I know you've got an idea that I'm quite a fan of Indiana Jones, and I love the series of movies. I remember using an illustration from Raiders of the Lost Ark a couple of months ago, and saying that it's time I watched the trilogy again. And I haven't yet!! This is a reminder that I must.

Have a look at this scene from the beginning of Raiders of the Lost Ark ... watch this.

Enter by the narrow door, before it's too late.

You see, Jesus is saying that time is running out.

He describes it as like being invited to a feast, but you arrive late and the owner has already shut the door.

Have you ever arrived late to a show and they won't let you in?

Of you just missed the last call for your plane and it's moving away from the terminal?

But Jesus is saying that there's more to it than just that.

You see it doesn't just depend on the timing.

What he says next is crucial.

You knock at the door, but the answer is,
'Who are you? I don't know you.'

The biggest issue is whether Jesus knows you.
Because there's good news and bad news.

The good news is that if Jesus knows you, then you belong with him.

The bad news is that if he doesn't know you, the door isn't just narrow, it's closed.

Now, in lots of circumstances in life, it's quite acceptable that we don't get entry to certain places.

In two weeks time we're going to a birthday party of one of our close friends.

Now I'm assuming that none of you got an invitation, cause I don't think that any of you know Barry. So you're probably not feeling bad or surprised that you didn't get an invitation.

We don't expect to go to a wedding of someone we don't know.

Well, the same goes for God's wedding feast at the end of time. We can't expect to be invited if we're not one of God's friends.

And that's why Jesus encourages people to make every effort to enter through the narrow door. To become part of God's family, before it's too late.

It'll be no good to complain later that you always meant to do it one day.

He goes on: "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'"

You see it isn't enough, just to be a God fearer. Someone who hangs around the edges and never quite commits.

It's not enough to say, "I was at church when this happened or that happened. I gave money to the building fund. I faithfully helped out all those years."

The people who tagged along with Jesus as he walked towards Jerusalem had all sorts of motives for doing so.

But it was only those who had a relationship with him,
who acknowledged him as Lord, that he'd recognise and acknowledge on the last day.
How terrible to miss out!

But the amazingly good news is that "People will come from east and west and north and south,
and will take their place at the feast in the kingdom of God."

That is, people from all over the world, will be there.

Paul says to the Philippians, 'keep your eyes fixed, for many live as enemies of the cross. But our citizenship is in heaven, therefore stand firm in the Lord'.

I want to say to everyone today - it is easy to be friends with God.

How?

Through Jesus.

He has brought us together. Our failings have been dealt with. We can stand before God as though we never did anything wrong.

Not because we're without fault, but because Jesus has taken the fault away when he died on the cross as a punishment for sin.

And of course this is great news not just for us, but also for our friends, for our families, and even those who think there is no hope, or who think they could never be good enough for God.

Jesus says, enter by the narrow door.

Say yes to the invitation.

Say yes I want to be one of your followers.

I want to be your friend, to be committed to you.

God sends his invitation freely to all who'll come. To all who will say yes to Jesus and his offer of forgiveness.

Put away pride and take the opportunity.

Don't be one left knocking, when the opportunity is now.

If you would like to walk through that narrow door today, there would be so much joy and love in this room if you said yes.

If you've been hanging back for a long time, don't hang back any longer.

And if you'd like to, you certainly don't have to, but if you'd like to, why not give it all up and walk down the front as a sign of freedom that you want to let God do this for you, and that all that Jesus has done on the cross is for you.

I'm going to pray, and if you'd like to pray too, you're very welcome to come and stand with me.

Dear Lord, thank you for your love for me, and for all that you have done for me. Please forgive me for all I have done, which has hurt you and others. I am so sorry for my sins. Thank you that on the cross you offer me forgiveness and show me the way to new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Please come into my life and take over as my Lord and Saviour. I commit myself to you. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.