

LUKE 13:22-30

²² [Jesus] went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³ And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, ²⁴ "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the 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.' ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Jesus has been going throughout the towns and villages teaching of the Kingdom of God. Just before the text we have here, Jesus was teaching of the Kingdom of God being like a mustard seed a man sowed in his garden, so that when the mustard seed grew, it became a tree strong enough for the birds of the air to make nests in its branches.

But this was only after he had taught how the kingdom is a gift from God, Luke 12:32:

[Jesus said,] "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

This is the kingdom we hear of when the angel speaks to Mary, telling her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and she will bear the Son of God. The angel tells her that her Son's kingdom will be eternal. [Luke 1:33]

This is the kingdom pulling in a sinful woman of the city, so that in thankfulness she enters the Pharisee's house in order to anoint Jesus' feet. [Luke 7:36]

It is the kingdom of Jesus forgiving sins and sending out his Apostles to forgive sins; the kingdom of Jesus healing the servant of a Gentile centurion; of him looking at the paralytic let down on a mat and saying, "Your sins are forgiven," then telling the paralytic to stand up and walk; the kingdom of Jesus touching lepers and making them healthy; of him eating and drinking with the worst sinners in town and announcing himself to be friend to tax-collectors, drunks, and sinners—it is the kingdom of God the Son coming in the flesh to be with sinners, to take their sin upon himself, to cleanse them of all shame, and to make them his own.

Jesus has been going out into the towns and villages teaching of this Kingdom of God, gathering sinners into it, and sure enough, someone comes up to him and says,

"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"

[Luke 13:23]

We may note that the man did not say to Jesus words of thanksgiving for opening the Kingdom of God to all sinners; he did not say words of praise, extolling the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; he did not even say words of petition, praying for mercy for someone he knew or even for himself. He said, *"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"*

He asked a question seeking the limits of God's Kingdom. Where do the borders of the kingdom stop? Who will not be allowed in? What are the measurements of the kingdom, what is the count of those saved?

It is a question wielding the Law. Who can get in, who can't? Who is worthy, who is not? To whom does the Lord's mercy reach, from whom is the Lord's mercy withheld.

If the man wants to measure things by the Law, Jesus will show him how that's done. Luke 13:24:

²⁴ [Jesus said,] "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the 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.'

If the man had been looking around at others and wondering how many would get in, Jesus brings him to look at himself. If he's wondering how many will get in or how many won't be counted worthy, Jesus tells him what he must do: Strive to enter through the narrow door.

When all is said and done, when the Law has its way, the sinner is brought to repentance not because he is able to count up the sins of others, or is able to figure out how many make it into the kingdom, how many don't, but the sinner is brought to repentance because the Law has shown him his own sin and has excluded him from the kingdom, so that, in hearing the Law, the sinner finally hears the voice of the Lord say, *"I don't know you, I don't even know where you came from."*

The Law shrinks the borders of the Kingdom of God down so tightly that the man could now count the number of those who are saved without even getting to the number one. It's a small, tight kingdom when the kingdom is being run by the Law. But that's not the kingdom Jesus leaves the man with. Luke 13:29:

²⁹ [Jesus said,] "People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ And

behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

The kingdom is now bursting borders. It's a kingdom gathering in from the nations, bringing sinners of every tribe and language to the banquet table of the Kingdom of God. This is the kingdom Isaiah prophesied.

Isaiah is the prophet who had spoken of the virgin bearing a Son who would be called by the name *Immanuel*, which means, *God is with us*. [Isaiah 7:14]

This is the kingdom Isaiah also proclaimed when he promised the Messiah upon whom all our sins would be laid, and who would be oppressed and afflicted on our behalf, would be stricken for our sin, all in order that many would be accounted righteous. [Isaiah 53]

And this is the kingdom Isaiah describes as being gathered from all nations and all tongues, from Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, and from the distant coastlands.

This is the kingdom of Jesus, the virgin's Son, the suffering servant upon whom the sins of the world were laid, the kingdom not constricted and tightened down by the counting and measurements of the Law, but opened up to dimensions unheard of by the teachers of the Law, stretching to the farthest coastlands—this kingdom knows no boundaries of tribe or language or culture: ***The time is coming, [says the Lord,] to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory,¹⁹ and I will set a sign among them.*** [Isaiah 66:19]

And so Jesus, in going out into the villages and the towns, is including the unclean villages of the Samaritans and the Gentiles, gathering people to himself, into his kingdom. The sign set among them, it's Jesus, it's his cross, the salvation won for every sinner by the redeeming blood. This kingdom, thought the teachers of the Law, was small and constricted, confined to the acreage of the Temple, confined by the borders of Jerusalem and Israel.

But the Lord never meant Israel to be a matter of confining his salvation. He set Israel to be a light to the nations, a servant to the world of sinners; he set Israel to be his congregation into which he would gather the nations.

For Israel—the true Israel of God, that is—is the kingdom of God on Earth of all the sinners the Lord gathers to his name. Israel is gathered not by the Law, for all live under the condemnation of the Law—you don't need the kingdom of God for that—but the true Israel is gathered by the Gospel.

Where the Lord has his Gospel being proclaimed, where Jesus is justifying the guilty by his word of forgiveness, where the Holy Spirit is calling sinners to the Body and Blood to be cleansed of sin, there Jesus is gathering his true Israel, there is the Kingdom of God on Earth—it's his church. The counting is over. The Law has properly done its work of measuring when we have had it measure us and found us to be sinners.

Now, it's the Gospel.

In his Gospel, Jesus gathers you into his Israel, into the kingdom of God—the kingdom which reaches to the farthest boundaries, wanting to leave no sinner out, reaching into the home that is living in despair, into the marriage strained with conflict, into the friendship destroyed with malice, reaching even into the heart and conscience of the sinner living in fear. This kingdom knows no boundaries, for Jesus left out not one part of our sin, or of our shame, or of our fear. He took all our unrighteousness upon himself, so that his righteousness now goes to all. There is not a single sinner to whom we can say, Jesus is not for you, your sin does not belong to him.

And that is our own salvation. For in knowing that no sinner is to be left out of the proclamation of the Gospel, we can also know that the Gospel is for even us.

Now, it is the Gospel—Jesus having his Gospel proclaimed to all sinners, gathering even the lowliest into his kingdom. That is our salvation: Hebrews 12:24:

you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in Heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of the new testament, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.