

# Do or Die

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 13:18-35

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September 3, 2017

My son, Abe is playing football this year. He had his first scrimmage on Thursday. After four weeks of practice, he was really excited for this game. He was thinking about it all week. He imagined in his mind his first touchdown and his first tackle. He asked Maggie if she would sit on the front row. On game day, he started getting ready right after school. He put on his pants and cleats. He put on his shoulder pads and jersey. He had his helmet in hand and was ready for battle.

When we got to the stadium, he ran onto the field to meet his team and begin his warm ups. And I went to take my seat in the stands. But we had a problem. Not five minutes after we'd arrived, the coach started walking over toward me. He told me that Abe had forgotten his mouth guard and that, in no uncertain terms, Abe could not play football without his mouth guard. Can you imagine the disappointment he felt?

Have you ever felt that kind of disappointment? It's so frustrating when you think you're prepared for something only to find out later that you're not. Have you ever got to the checkout and realized you didn't have your wallet? Have you ever missed a flight because you showed up at the airport without your driver's license or your passport?

Situations like these are not the end of the world. We can catch the next flight. Or in Abe's case, I went home and got his mouth guard and he was able to play the second half of the game. But we find a much more serious situation in our text this morning.

Jesus tells the story of a person who shows up at the door of heaven. He thought he was good to go. But he finds out that he doesn't know Jesus. And the door of heaven has been closed forever. There's nothing he can do. He can't catch the next flight. He can't go home and get his wallet. He's shut out forever. Jesus tells us that we need to be prepared now for eternal life. This is our only chance.

Open your Bibles to Luke 13.

## **Luke 13:22-35<sup>1</sup>**

*<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 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!' <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."*

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

<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 would not!<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!’”

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage starts out with a deep question—a question maybe you’ve asked yourself at some point. A man walks up to Jesus and asks him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” There was some debate during this time as to whether or not all Jews would be saved or only a few.<sup>2</sup> And apparently this man thought Jesus could provide some insight. But Jesus completely obliterates the categories of the debate. He gives an answer that this man would’ve never expected. He says that the way to salvation is like a narrow door (vv. 22-28). But it’s also like a broad table (vv. 29-30).

I will organize my sermon around these two metaphors. In verses 22-28 we’ll see why Jesus says that the way to salvation is like a narrow door. Then in verses 29-30 we’ll see why he says it’s like a broad table. As I go along, I’ll also be drawing on verses 31-35.

## A NARROW DOOR (13:22-28, 31-33)

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Let’s start with the narrow door.

### *Do-Or-Die*

Jesus rarely answers a person’s question directly. Instead, he sees what a person needs to hear and addresses that deep need. So instead of answering the man’s question, it’s as if he asks *him* a question. The man asks, “Will only a *few* be saved?” It’s as if Jesus asks him, “Will *you* be saved?”<sup>3</sup>

Do you see the difference? The man’s question is *theoretical*. Jesus gets *personal*. Don’t ask me, “Will only a few be saved?” Instead I’ll ask you, “Will you be saved?” Now that’s not what Jesus actually says. But I think that’s what he means when he says, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

The Greek word for strive here is *agonizomai*. This is where we get our word “agonize.” It was used of athletes engaging in a competition or of warriors fighting in battle. One commentator says it involves a do-or-die resolution.<sup>4</sup>

The phrase “do-or-die” means that we need to act with decisiveness. It’s now or never. We don’t actually mean if you don’t “do” you will “die.” But when it comes to being saved, it *is* a matter of life or death. We must strive to enter the narrow door now if we want to be saved. Otherwise we will die; we won’t be saved. It’s a now or never proposition, but in an eternal sense.

So Jesus tells this man that instead of agonizing about how many will be saved that he needs to agonize about whether or not he’s saved. He says, “Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

<sup>2</sup> See Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* and Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*

<sup>3</sup> Bock, *Luke*

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*

But what does Jesus mean by the narrow door? I think he has two things in mind. The best way I know how to explain it is by giving two more metaphors. Not only is the way to salvation like a narrow door. The narrow door is like a narrow window and a narrow road.

### *A Narrow Window*

The reason I say it's like a narrow window is because there's only a narrow window of opportunity to be saved. There's only limited time to respond to Jesus. This comes out in verse 24-25.

Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 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.'"

These verses are *not* saying that there are people who want to be saved now but can't. I'll address that more specifically a little later. These verses are saying that the window of opportunity for salvation is now. If we don't respond to Jesus in faith now, then the door will be shut for us when we die. We must respond to Jesus *before* we die. Hebrews says, "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (9:27). There's no time to trust in Jesus *after* you die. It will be too late at that point.

The narrow door is like a narrow window of opportunity.

### *A Narrow Way*

But it's also like a narrow way or a narrow road. The reason I say that is because Jesus is the only way to salvation. Only a personal relationship with Jesus will save. This comes out in verses 26-28.

In his parable, Jesus seems to indicate that many people think they're going to heaven. So much so that they even show up at the gates of heaven only to be sent away on the road to hell.<sup>5</sup>

Why do some people in this parable think they're going to heaven when in fact they're not? It's because some people think they have a *relationship* with Jesus when all they really have is an *association* with Jesus. Some Jews had a religious association with Jesus. And all of them had an ethnic association with Jesus.

And so when they show up at heaven's gate, they're confused as to why they're shut out. But Jesus says that an association with him was not enough. Only a personal relationship with Jesus will save.

Why do I say that some only had a *religious* association with Jesus? This comes out in verses 26-27. There will be some who knock at the door of heaven but will be shut out. And they will say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." To which Jesus will say to them, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil." Some will think they're saved just because they spent time eating with Jesus while he was on earth. Some will think they're saved just because they heard Jesus' teaching. But Jesus says that a religious association with Jesus is not enough. You need to know Jesus personally.

Have you ever heard someone say that they know a famous or important person only to find out that they only met them once? Meeting someone once or twice doesn't equal knowing that person.

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<sup>5</sup> See Bunyan quoted in Spurgeon, "Self-Delusion," in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volume 8*, 585

Most name droppers rarely know the person whose name they're dropping. The same is true with Jesus. Some casual acquaintance with Jesus doesn't equal knowing him.

The second reason first century Jews may have thought they were saved was simply because they were Jews. This is seen in verse 28. Jesus makes it very clear that there will be some Jews in heaven and some Jews in hell. Their ethnicity would do nothing to save them.

Some will come to the door of heaven and Jesus will say, "Depart from me, all you workers of evil! 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."

So a casual association with Jesus is not enough. And being a Jew is not enough. Those who thought they were on the inside were actually on the outside. You can be close to Jesus and still be closed out on the last day. If you want to be saved you must strive to enter through the narrow door. We must know Jesus. We have to have a personal relationship with him.

### ***Jesus' Death and Resurrection***

And how does a person come into relationship with Jesus? It starts with trusting in his death and resurrection. It's important to note that the dialogue that's taking place is all happening while Jesus was journeying toward Jerusalem (v. 22). After the conversation was over, we're told in verse 31 that some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Jesus basically says that he's not worried about Herod. 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. 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.'"

Jesus knew that Herod would be no threat to him away from Jerusalem. He would make it to Jerusalem. That was why he came. He was *going* to die for the sins of his people. And he *would* be raised on the third day. There was nothing Herod could do to stop that. And there was nothing the Pharisees could do to stop that.

If we want to know Jesus, we have to place our trust in him. We must personally trust in his death for forgiveness. We must personally trust in his resurrection for eternal life. When that happens, we enter into a relationship with him. It's only through knowing him personally and trusting him that we can be saved.

### ***Application***

While Jesus was primarily speaking to the Jews in his day, what he says to them applies very much to us today. How many people today think their religious association with Jesus will save them? They've attended church. They've come to the Lord's Table for communion. They've heard Jesus' teaching in the church. And maybe even agree with it. But unless you *personally trust* in Jesus, you won't be saved.

How many people today think their Christian heritage will save them? They grew up in a Christian home. Maybe they come from a long line of Christians. Their parents were Christians, their grandparents were Christians, and their great grandparents were Christians. But our Christian heritage will do nothing to save us, any more than an ethnic Jew's Jewish heritage will save them. Unless you *personally know* Jesus, you won't be saved.

In a church this size, I suspect there are some here who think they're saved, but don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. Why do I say that? It's not because I have some secret knowledge. And it's not because I have anyone specifically in mind that I'm questioning their salvation. It's simply because throughout the history of the church there have always been people who thought they were saved only to later come to realize they weren't.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, our own denomination was founded by people who were in the church but were not Christians. Cesar Malan was a pastor in the church at Geneva in the nineteenth century. He certainly thought was a Christian! But he came to realize that he couldn't be a Christian because he didn't believe in the deity of Christ. After some amazing events, Malan was converted and came to know Christ personally.

And on Easter Sunday of 1817 he announced to his congregation that he had just become a true believer. He was later thrown out of the church for holding evangelical beliefs. This became one of the catalysts in the development of the Evangelical Free Church.<sup>7</sup>

So throughout the history of the church there have been people that thought their association with Jesus was enough to save them, but then realized that they didn't know Jesus personally. And all of this is not to mention the many people in the New Testament who proved to not truly know Jesus. In Charles Spurgeon's sermon on this passage he mentions Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, Phygellus and Hermogenes, Demas, Alexander, Hymenaeas, and Philetus.<sup>8</sup> All of these people were associated with Jesus or the church but were not Christians.

Friends, I urge you, don't show up to the football game without your mouth guard. You won't get in the game. Don't show up to the airport without your passport. You won't get on the plane. And don't show up to the gates of heaven without Jesus, without a personal relationship with him. You won't make it in.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. The window of opportunity is short. And the only way to be saved is through Jesus Christ. Have you trusted in Christ alone for salvation? Have you trusted in his cross as the only way to be forgiven of your sins? Have you trusted in him alone for eternal life? Do you know Jesus personally? Or is it all just theoretical and theological for you?

The door is narrow. And the door is the person of Jesus Christ.

## **A BROAD TABLE (13:29-30, 34-35)**

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But that's not the only way Jesus talks about salvation. Not only is the door narrow. The table is also broad. In verse 29, Jesus changes the metaphor from a door to a table. The metaphor of the door has to do with getting into the house. The metaphor of the table has to do with eating in the house. It has to do with fellowship.

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<sup>6</sup> My favorite preacher of the twentieth century was Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He says that the main danger confronting the pulpit is for preachers to assume that all who claim to be Christians, and who think they are Christians, and who are members of the church, are therefore of necessity Christians. He says it is a fallacy to believe that all people in the church are Christians. And the first reason he gives for saying this is a fallacy is the fact that he himself thought he was a Christian for many years when he wasn't. He was a member of a church and attended services regularly. And anyone would have thought that he was a true believer. But he wasn't. He didn't put his trust in Jesus until he was in medical school in London. It wasn't until then that he entered into a personal relationship. (Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 146)

<sup>7</sup> Hanson, *What It Means to Be Free*, 27-28

<sup>8</sup> Spurgeon, 579-580

***Salvation is for all peoples.***

Right after Jesus says that not all Jews will be saved. Right after he says that the way to heaven is exclusively through a relationship with him. He goes on to make an important qualification. Salvation is for all peoples.

Even though Jesus is the only way to be saved, anyone can be saved. In John 3:16 we read that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Whoever! That doesn’t mean than everyone can be saved, but it does mean that anyone can be saved; any type of person.

The man asking Jesus the question wanted to know if only a few Jews would be saved. Jesus says, you’re thinking in the wrong categories. The only Jews who will be saved are those who trust in Jesus. But there will be way more people who are saved than the Jews. “People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Who will have eternal fellowship with God? A people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The Jews and the Gentiles will be saved.

The Jews were first. But they will be last. And the Gentiles were last. But they will be first. Romans 9-11 teaches us that the Jews largely rejected Jesus and that led to the Gentiles accepting Jesus. But it also teaches us that one day, toward the end of this age, a large number of Jews will be saved. The first will be last and the last will be first.

So, even though the way to be saved is narrow. Those who will be saved represent a very broad swath of humanity. This is incredible news.

As I was studying this passage this week around a table with our Chinese pastor Daniel Tien and our Hispanic missions partner Abdel Gonzalez, this truth hit me. I said, “Do you guys see the truth of this passage? It’s right here in front of us. A small Chinese man from Taiwan, a handsome Mexican from Juarez, and a big hick from Texas are all sitting around the table talking about Jesus. We have come to know him personally and truly. We have fellowship with Jesus because in God’s sovereign plan he decided that salvation would be for all peoples, not just the Jews.”

This is good news. And this drives our mission as a church to take the gospel wide to all peoples. It drives our spending to set 25% of our budget to missions. And it all started right here in Luke. It’s glorious!

***Jesus is willing.***

Before we finish today, I need to make a couple more important points about this broad table that Jesus speaks of in verse 29. First, Jesus is *willing* to save all.

When we talk about the exclusive claims of Christ, it can seem harsh, especially to our pluralistic ears. Our culture doesn’t like the fact that Jesus is the only way to salvation. In verse 35, Jesus is speaking to the Jews, and he says, “Behold, your house is forsaken.” We don’t like the announcement of God’s judgment on the Jews or on anyone for that matter. But there’s something very important to say about all of that. In verse 34, Jesus says, “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.”

Literally it says, “How willing I was to gather you...but you were not willing.” Or, “I desired to gather you...but you didn’t share that desire.” This is similar to what we read last week in 2 Peter 3:9. “The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

When we talk about the reality of judgment or the exclusive claims of Christ, it’s easy to think that God is harsh and mean. But Jesus is not willing that any should perish. He is willing to gather the Jews and all people to himself and to have table fellowship with them. It’s those who reject Christ who aren’t willing.

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. Without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened.<sup>9</sup>*

Sure, at judgment, it will be too late. The door will be barred and bolted. But while we still have breath, we still have the opportunity to trust in Jesus. Those who seek find. To those who knock, it is opened.

Those who face the eternal judgment of God are those who were not willing to trust in Christ. The problem is not with God. The problem is with man. Jesus is willing to save all.

And not only that, Jesus is grieved by the judgment of any. Jesus says, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children...” Jesus grieves over Jerusalem and their rejection of him. In Ezekiel 33, the Lord says, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live...”

God doesn’t delight in man’s judgment. God is grieved by it. God delights in our repentance!

The nineteenth century preacher J.C. Ryle puts it so well. “It is not enough that those who aren’t willing to come grieve their family or their church. There is one higher than all these, whom they deeply grieve by their conduct. They are daily grieving Christ.”

Jesus is willing to save you today. He is grieved if you have not yet placed your trust in him. Strive to enter through the narrow door. The time is short, but the offer for salvation stands today. Repent and believe and be saved.

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<sup>9</sup> In *The Quotable Lewis*, “Hell: Self-Choice”