

# Luke 13:22 - 14:11 // The Narrow Door

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[0:00] Our reading this morning comes from the book of Luke, and that's chapter 13, beginning to read! That's on page 1047 of the church bibles. Page 1047.

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? He said to them, Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 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. But he will answer, I don't know you or where you come from. Then you will say, We ate and drank with you, and you taught us, and he taught in our streets. But he will reply, I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers. There will be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last. At that time, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you. He replied, Go and tell that fox. I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day, I will reach my goal. In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day, for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you. How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you are not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

[3:23] Then he asked them, If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a whale on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out? And they had nothing to say. When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable, When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, Give this person your seat.

Then humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you're invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, Friend, move up to a better place. Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. This is the word of the Lord.

Alan, thanks so much for reading. And please keep your Bibles open at page 1047. You'll find it enormously helpful to be able to follow as we work our way through. Before we do, let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you so much that you are a speaking God, and that you have spoken with such clarity through your Son. And we pray that as we read his words, you please will help us to believe them deeply, and respond as you would have us do. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I know that I don't sound like it these days, but I'm from Glasgow originally. And one of the things that I've really enjoyed since coming back to Glasgow is being reacquainted with the language, and particularly some of the Glasgow words which just have a clarity and suggestiveness about them that's very difficult to find anywhere else. Who knows what an empty is?

Who knows what an empty is? If you grow up in Glasgow, you'll know exactly what that means. It's usually a phrase stated with a particular tone. An empty. An empty, for those who don't know, is a house where the parents have gone away for the weekend. It is therefore a house with possibilities. [6:03] A house that might, owing to the parental absence, be filled with one's friends, and partying, and eating, and drinking, and so on. Houses have wonderful possibilities for people, and for partying. Keep that idea in your mind for a moment, and have a look at Luke chapter 13, verse 22. We're back in Luke's gospel for the next few weeks. We're on the way to Jerusalem.

There are huge crowds, and there's an air of excitement because the Jewish festival of Passover is coming. But even more exciting than the prospect of a celebration in Jerusalem is the fact that Jesus is in the crowd, and his popularity has taken off because of his teaching and his miracles. Some of his teaching, though, has been uncomfortable. There have been words about God's judgment coming.

There have been urgent commands for people on the way to Jerusalem to turn around, metaphorically speaking, to repent, to stop going the way they are in life because of the judgment that's coming, and so avoid disaster. So it's not a surprise that we read in verse 23 someone asking this question.

Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? If judgment is coming, are lots of people going to be safe, or only a few?

[7:43] Well, this week and next, we're going to be considering Jesus' response to that question, and his response is both challenging and unsettling. Only a few people, Lord.

No, says Jesus, loads of people, huge numbers, but not the sort of people that the people of Israel might expect. And interestingly, all the way through this section, and indeed beyond this section, in answering this question, Jesus speaks of a house with a party, and all kinds of interesting guests, and some very surprising exclusions.

There are three scenes in today's passage, and one way or another, each one has a house and a party. The first scene pictures the ultimate house. The next, a great house in Jerusalem.

The third is set in a very ordinary house, on the way to Jerusalem. And in each scene, Jesus' teaching completely overturns the expectations of his day, and I think we'll find his teaching overturns the expectations of our own day.

The title for this morning's sermon is, Too Puffed Up for the Party. And in scene one, we meet the ultimate house, and its very unusual door.

[9:19] Look at verse 23 again. Jesus doesn't directly answer the question. He's asked, Are there only going to be a few, Lord?

He answers, Make sure that you are one of them. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter, and will not be able to.

There's a door. He calls it the narrow door, which implies there might be other doors available, maybe wider ones. But the narrow door is the door to the house that's pictured here.

Interesting word for a door, isn't it? Narrow. Most of our houses have adequate size doors. Usually doors to great houses are great doors.

And when they're open, they're easy to get through, and they're quite exciting to go through. We have a friend who took us on a tour of the Houses of Parliament in London.

[10:26] And let me tell you, it's very grand in the Houses of Parliament. And I remember entering through the open door into Westminster Hall, and just going through the door is quite thrilling, because it's amazing.

Never mind being in the room. This door is different. It's unusually narrow for a great house.

It's open at the moment, but it's not obviously the entry point to somewhere special. It doesn't look as though if you squeezed through the door, there would be just loads of people on the other side, and it would be the most amazing place you could possibly be.

However, look at verse 25. There will come a day when the door is shut. And on that day, it will be obvious to everyone that inside is the place to be.

Remember, these are Jesus' words to a real crowd. You will stand outside, knocking, pleading, Sir, open the door for us.

[11:39] But he will answer, I don't know you. Hang on a minute. Hang on a minute. We had dinner with you. We listened to your teaching. Of course you know us.

No. I don't even recognize the place you come from. Go away, you evil people. What a terrible thing it would be to be on the outside of the ultimate human gathering.

This isn't an empty with a dodgy party going on inside. To know forever that you don't belong and you can't belong.

Look at verse 28. Look at the regret that's described here. The anguish as people who believed God's promises, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and bravely spoke God's words, all the prophets and people like them from east and west and north and south find themselves inside the house and other people find themselves outside and unable to get in.

This isn't fear of missing out that's being described here. This is despair at having missed out for good. And notice, this is really important, folks.

[12 : 57] Notice this. Proximity to Jesus is not the way in. Eating at the same table as him, hearing his words, that's not the way in.

I never knew you, he says. Knowing him is the way in. And what that means, of course, for us is that things like this are not the way in.

Being in church is not the way in. Coming from a Christian home is not the way in. Reading the Bible and praying every day is not the way in. Being a spiritually minded person or trying to live ethically, these are not the ways in.

Knowing him is the way in. And what does that mean exactly? Well, we'll learn a bit more about what that means a little later on. And over the next few weeks as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, we fill in the picture of what it actually is like and means to know him.

So it really would be worth coming back these next Sunday mornings. Let me say, if you're new to Christian things, just checking it out for yourself, you're so welcome. There's a lot to think about.

[14 : 08] But knowing Jesus is right at the heart of the Christian message. So why not come back and explore as we journey to Jerusalem? Or you might have been a Christian for absolutely ages, but sometimes you wonder, do I really know Jesus?

Is this really what it's like to know him? Well, come back and we'll learn together more. For the moment, notice that this ultimate house has a narrow door, an unusual door.

It's not the kind of door you'd think the ultimate house would have. And notice verse 30, first, last, last, first. There's an upside-downness about access to this house.

So the reason that many people don't enter is not that the door is hidden or closed, it's that it's, well, it's unusual. Access to that forever home doesn't work the way access to things usually works for human beings.

So when Jesus says in verse 25, make every effort to enter, he doesn't mean be superhumanly brilliant and work extra hard at being a splendid person.

[15 : 27] Quite the opposite, actually. He says this because entry to this house doesn't work the way things usually work for human beings. So, scene one, the ultimate house and its unusual door.

Scene two, a desolate house in a dangerous city. Verse 31, Jesus meets a potential distraction. Pharisees arrive. These people are the biggest influencers in first century Israel. Outwardly very religious people but also very jealous of Jesus' growing influence.

And they bring what looks like well-intentioned advice. Jesus, you need to know King Herod is out to get you. So really, it would be worth going somewhere else and not going to Jerusalem.

That would be a bad idea right now. It looks well-intentioned. More likely, it's an attempt to wrest public opinion away from him and back to them.

[16 : 35] To have Jesus, who's now so popular, come to Jerusalem at Passover when everyone will be there and have access to him, that would be very bad indeed.

Let's try and get him to go somewhere else. Jesus, however, is not distractible. Go and tell that fox, I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow and on the third day I'll reach my goal and when I get there, Jerusalem is going to do exactly the same to me as it's always done.

Jerusalem has a history of murdering God's messengers. But the murder of Jesus, which he fully anticipates is going to happen, is not an accident.

Look at verse 32 again. Jesus is not saying, I'm jolly well just going to keep doing the good things, delivering people from demons and illness even if Jerusalem is going to kill me when I get there.

What he is saying is, the goal, the climax of all the good things that I've been doing will be accomplished through me being killed in Jerusalem.

[17:53] the deliverances on the road where Jesus defeats the great powers of supernatural evil and sickness, they are mere forerunners to the ultimate deliverance as Jesus, the sinless one, through his sacrificial death, soaks up God's judgment on sins, killing sin's power so that people who trust him can escape the judgment to come.

That of course is why knowing him is so important in the previous scene. Access to that ultimate house only comes to people whose sins are dealt with.

To get into that wonderful forever home, you need to know the sin killer. That's an unusual way in, isn't it? to a banquet. But, Jerusalem doesn't want that kind of help.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were not willing.

What Jesus has longed for is that Jerusalem, this murderous city, would come to him trusting him for what she needs.

[19:25] But no, verse 35, Jerusalem's house, the temple in Jerusalem, is a desolate house now.

And here, in verse 35, we get words quoted from Psalm 118. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Now, we haven't got time this morning to dig into Psalm 118, but it's an enormously important psalm. It's often used at festivals and it's very often referred to in the New Testament.

And the big theme of this psalm is that it's much, much better to take refuge in the Lord than trust in people. And the psalm recounts the experience of a great leader who faced terrible enemies and was rescued from death by God.

And it describes his journey to an arrival in Jerusalem and his entrance through the door, through the gates of the temple, the house of the Lord. And despite having been rejected by those in charge of the house of the Lord, he himself becomes absolutely central to this house and becomes a channel of God's steadfast love to people.

[20:42] And, verse 35, those words are spoken in the psalm by people who've been on the receiving end of God's steadfast love through this great one.

Blessed is the one who's come in the name of the Lord. That psalm speaks profoundly of the journey that Jesus is now on and the access to God's house that he's going to provide for people. And it's quite possible that this part of Luke's gospel is so full of houses and doors and feasts and celebration precisely because Jesus and Luke after him have Psalm 118 in mind.

The words in verse 35 are shouted only a few days later by the jubilant crowd as Jesus enters Jerusalem. But they are not shouted because people recognize Jesus to be the sin killer.

They are shouted because they think he's going to be the Roman killer, a revolutionary king. And when they realize he's not going to do that, they murder him.

[21:57] And so the house of God in Jerusalem, the temple in Jerusalem is a house that God has abandoned. It's a desolate house.

It's an empty but there's no fun there. This is not a place where God is at home. This is not a place that people are ever going to find God's steadfast love in.

That house is over says Jesus. Now I guess that for most of us that doesn't really register as being all that significant. A person who's investigating Jesus these days is unlikely to think, I know, I must go to Jerusalem and see if I can find the remnant of the physical gate of the house of the Lord so I can go in there.

but for a first century person, a person like Theophilus who Luke addresses his gospel to, it's quite important to know from the lips of Jesus that the temple in Jerusalem is now an abandoned house. It is not the place to find God because the people of Israel on the whole did not respond positively to Jesus and yet the temple carried on beyond Jesus' death uninterrupted for another 30 years after Jesus died until the Romans destroyed it.

[23:26] For a long time you see the temple's big wide door remained open. It looked like it might still be a place where God can be found but no according to Jesus God has left the building.

So we've met an ultimate house and its unusual door, a desolate house in a very dangerous city. Finally in scene 3 we meet a much more ordinary house and in scene 3 we begin to see why it is that the door to the ultimate house might be narrow, difficult to enter and we begin to see why it is that Jerusalem is going to murder Jesus rather than being gathered to him.

What on earth would stop someone coming to Jesus and receiving forgiveness from him and entry into the ultimate home forever?

What would stop somebody coming for that? It would have to be a big thing wouldn't it? Well in scene 3 we meet a Pharisee's house and it's puffed up occupants.

This house is an ordinary house, it's a decent house, it's owned by a prominent Pharisee but from the moment Jesus arrives it's clear that the Pharisees are not nearly as well intentioned as they appeared earlier on.

[24 : 55] He's being watched carefully. He's a healer and there's a sick man present and it's the Sabbath. interestingly the sick man is a swollen man.

He has well literally dropsy, we'd call it heart failure. The pump is not pumping properly and one of the results of that is that bodily fluids go to all the wrong places and people with untreated heart failure can get massive swelling feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, everything if it's really bad.

This is a swollen man. Now it's against God's law to work on the Sabbath and according to them healing belongs in the category of work so if Jesus heals we'll be able to call him a lawbreaker.

That's going to give us the upper hand and when he asks them if healing is lawful on the Sabbath they're stubbornly silent. They long to catch him out but he heals the man and immediately exposes their hypocrisy.

Look if your son or your ox fell into a well on the Sabbath wouldn't you drag them out? And of course they would. They're unable to answer because they know they would even though it would be against their understanding of the Sabbath.

[26 : 19] And then having disarmed their trap he takes the attack to them. He paints a picture of a banquet. I noticed that when you came into dinner you all chose the best seat you could get.

Well imagine that you've been invited to a great wedding feast. Wouldn't it be really embarrassing if you did get there and you did there what you just did here and sat in the very best seat you could get and then someone really more important than you arrived and the host came along and at the table in public where everyone can see said sorry do you mind just moving down the table a bit?

That would be really embarrassing wouldn't it? Wouldn't it be safer says Jesus to place yourself down the far end of the table? You never know you might even be moved up a few notches.

That would be quite encouraging. And then at the end of the parable comes the devastating statement. The statement of how things actually work in God's kingdom.

The statement that identifies why the door to God's kingdom is so unexpected. Why it is that Jerusalem and its people were totally unwilling to come to Jesus. And why it is that the Pharisees at dinner were so eager to catch him out.

[27 : 47] Here it is. It's a devastating statement. Verse 11. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

And those who humble themselves will be exalted. See normally normally good things come to human beings when they achieve stuff.

When they're just a bit better at something than somebody else is. But entry into God's kingdom into that ultimate house. That forever home.

The place that's so full of rejoicing. It really doesn't work that way. All who exalt themselves says Jesus will be humbled.

Which means that we don't get in by achieving things. You don't get in by occupying the moral high ground.

[28 : 54] You don't get in by conforming to the ethical norms of your day. You don't get in by being better than other people at things. You don't get in by passing your exams.

You don't get in by pleasing your parents. You don't get in by being liked by your friends or respected by your peers. You don't get in by being a successful person.

You don't get in by being a good parent or a good husband or a good wife or being an upstanding member of society. You don't get in by getting a good degree or a good job.

You don't get in by achieving wonderful things in life. By leaving your mark on the world. By doing fantastic research. By writing books. By healing patients.

By developing a miracle cure. Or saving the environment. Or earning a Nobel prize. Or helping the disadvantaged. Or being a warrior for social justice. Or by anything like that.

[29 : 56] Being better than someone else. An exercise that's so normal for us. Gets you nowhere. And the reason that we don't get in for any of those normal reasons.

Those normal human status marking activities no matter how good they are is that our sin problem is so enormous that only the death of Jesus in Jerusalem could possibly make it go away.

The Pharisees house is full of normal human activity. People who measure themselves in relation to one another. who try to look as good as they can.

Who try to hide their deviations from the ethical norms of the day. And who are really quite confident that they can make it on their own. Puffed up people.

The swollen man in their midst is a visual illustration of the swollenness of this household. Puffed up. difficult for a swollen person to get through a narrow door.

[31 : 16] Indeed quite impossible. All those who exalt themselves will be humbled says Jesus. The only way in is recognizing that on your own there's no way in.

None at all. There never will be. But the thing about Jesus is that he can heal swollenness. He can deal with puffed up people.

So the only way into that ultimate home, that wonderful forever home, that great celebration is to humble yourself and be gathered to Jesus whose goal is to die for the forgiveness of sins because of him and because of him alone those who humble themselves will be exalted in the end.

Let's pray together. Just a moment to respond in the quiet to what the Lord has said to us and then I'll lead us in prayer. Amen. for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

father in heaven we thank you so much for sending your son for his determination to go to Jerusalem to bear the sins of the world and we pray that you will help us today to believe his words very deeply that those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

[33 : 18] Thank you that you are able to deal with swollen people. Please be at work in us today to that end for we ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.