

Luke 13:18-30

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Date: 20 October 2013

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know about your house. It seems to me that every house has lists of jobs that are needed to be done. And there are certain types of lists, aren't there? There are the urgent list, and there is the list where it rarely gets done or it gets put onto another list.

And urgency only comes upon us when something is important, isn't it? And when it really matters, and it's imminent, that it's going to happen soon.

Urgency is what you feel the night before your exams. Urgency is what you feel when you wake up and you can hear the bin lorry outside, and you've not put the bags out as you race down the street chasing the bin man.

Urgency, though, is not something, I think, which characterises Christians very often. And the reason for that is sometimes we fail to see how important God's kingdom is.

Because it's crowded out, isn't it, by the day-to-day things that occupy us. We fail to see how urgent God's kingdom is, because we've been softened, haven't we, to the reality of Jesus' return.

[1 : 09] Dick Lucas is a friend of this church. I was with him last week, and he was telling me that when he was in Seven Oaks as a young curate, that his minister preached the return of the Lord Jesus Christ every Sunday night.

He's coming, he's coming, he's coming. The problem is with that, after six months of being there, you thought, well, he hasn't come so far, he's never going to come. And so you are softened, aren't you? We are immune to it.

Two thousand years since Jesus' return, since he ascended into heaven. But Jesus insists, for you and I, that there is nothing more urgent to address than where people stand with him, where you stand with him.

Because when it comes to following the Lord Jesus, there is such a thing as too late. Do you see that in verse 25? Verse 25. When once the master of the house has risen and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside, there's a knock on the door, saying, Lord, open to us.

Then he will answer from within, I do not know where you come from. One day the door of heaven will close, and there will be no way in. So let's see why we should be urgent.

[2 : 21] We're in a section of Luke's Gospel, from chapter 9, verse 51, to the end of chapter 19. And Jesus is teaching about the nature of his kingdom. What is it like to live in the kingdom of God?

What does it mean to be a member of his kingdom, to be one of his followers? And he is facing opposition from Jewish religious leaders. They were the experts in the Bible of their day.

And we're going to see why they are not urgent, and why we must be urgent. Firstly, we must be urgent about the kingdom, because the kingdom is important.

We must be urgent about the kingdom, because the kingdom is important. Have a look down at verse 18. He said, therefore, what is the kingdom of God like? And to watch like compare it, it is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.

Last week, if you were here last week, we saw that the synagogue ruler, the kind of Bible study group leader in the section before, had got the kingdom of God wrong.

[3 : 25] He thought the kingdom of God was about keeping his rules, about keeping his set of rules. And Jesus showed that it was about God's plan to set people free, all sorts of different people.

And here Jesus illustrates it, that the mustard seed is tiny. It's about the size of a pinhead, but it grows to a tree of about 10 to 12 feet tall.

Something that is very small. That is how it appears at the beginning. You put the mustard seed in your ground, and it appears tiny. And then it grows. But Luke's emphasis is not really on the size of

the tree, but is on who's hanging out in the tree.

Who's hanging out in the tree? Look, it is the birds of the air perching in its branches. And that is an Old Testament image. So we could go to Ezekiel 31, or Ezekiel 17, or to Daniel chapter 4.

And each of those examples, the birds of the air, stand for the nations of the world perching in a tree. So Jesus is saying, my kingdom will be people from all over my world.

[4 : 33] And what looks like a tiny little group of people traipsing to Jerusalem on this journey, where their leader is going to die, will become a worldwide phenomenon, including all kinds of people.

And I guess as you look around this morning, are we our proof of that, aren't we? We're proof that one day the kingdom of God will permeate everything. Look at verse 20 and 21.

And again he said, to what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, yeast, that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened.

When you put yeast in dough and you knead it, some of you have got bread makers, but if you make proper bread, isn't it? You kind of, you knead the yeast into the dough, you put it there, and it goes through the whole of the dough and it's active.

The yeast is living, isn't it? It's alive. And once you put the yeast into the dough, you can't get it out again. And so it will be with my kingdom, Jesus says.

[5 : 33] It will permeate everything. In the end, there will be nothing in the world that is not affected by the kingdom of God. So let me ask you, what is the big thing that God is doing in the world today?

What is the big thing that God is doing in the world today? Is it the finances? The economies? Of the world?

Is it Syria? Is it the Premier League? Does it sometimes feel that your family life is the big thing? No, it's not. It's the bringing in of the kingdom. And that is the irresistible program that God is running. That is the purpose of human history. And that is a huge encouragement, isn't it?

And it means that there's nothing more important and nothing more relevant than what you're doing now. Than what you're doing today. That you're gathering together as God's people to think about the kingdom.

[6 : 35] To hear the kingdom proclaimed. To celebrate the kingdom. And sometimes we feel so small, don't we? What are we? A hundred and thirty, a hundred and forty on a Sunday morning?

We sing and we encourage each other. And of course that's great. But it's a little bit different, isn't it? When we're separated off from one another. And we're on our own. When you're at home on your own.

When children, you're in the playground. And you're on your own. And you feel like you're the only Christian there. Well you need to remember the kingdom of God. That one day it will permeate everything.

And that is the thing that God is doing in the world. But as well as an encouragement. It's a great challenge, isn't it? It's the trivia of our lives. I think Jesus starts talking about his kingdom.

And the nature of his kingdom. Right after this synagogue ruler. Because this synagogue ruler clearly didn't get it. Clearly he didn't think that Jesus was very important, did he?

[7 : 36] He didn't think that Jesus was worth following the synagogue ruler. So Jesus in his parables says to the synagogue ruler. And he says to us. You've missed how big I am. It might be a small start.

It might be a crippled woman here. It might be a tax collector. Come and follow me there. It might be a blind person over there. But this kingdom I am bringing is the thing.

And it's going to involve all sorts of people. You cannot limit it. And it's going to be everywhere. And you and I have got to keep fighting to see that. So often our lives are filled with, aren't they, meaningless trivia.

So as we walk to work in the morning. As we stand at the bus stop. As we get on the tube tomorrow morning. We pray thinking kingdom, kingdom, kingdom. That's what matters. That's why Sundays are fantastic.

Aren't they? As you get up on a Sunday morning. You say this is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it. You gather your family together if you've got a family. And you pray and you ask the Lord to bless us.

[8 : 46] You're able on a Sunday morning to have a slightly more relaxed Sunday, aren't you? To spend more time in prayer around the Bible. And you come to Sunday school because you want to learn. And then you gather together and we have the call to worship.

And then you hear these words. Let us worship God. Boom! Should go off. Because it fixes our eyes on the kingdom. And what God is doing.

It's not that you don't worship during the week. Of course you do. All of life. But Sundays, the Sabbath, the day of rest. As we gather together. It is a great reminder that God's kingdom is huge. You look around the room. You see people from all over the world. And one day it's all there will be. One day. And it permeates everything. And in God's kingdom.

God's glorious new world. There will only be God's kingdom. But before that happens. God's king is marching to his death. On his way through towns and villages. Teaching and journeying towards Jerusalem. Here's the second reason why the kingdom is urgent.

[9 : 44] The kingdom is urgent because the kingdom is important. The kingdom is urgent because the way is narrow. The way is narrow. Whenever you get people together to talk about God. There are always questions, aren't there?

They're the same questions. How science this proved God? What about suffering? What about those who've never heard? Well here's a question for Jesus from Jesus' day.

Look at verse 23. And someone said to him, Lord will those who are saved be few? Are there only going to be a few saved? The question seems to be this, isn't it?

In Jesus' day. Is it really only the godliest, highest, godliest Pharisees? Is it only them that will make it into God's kingdom? Or will some of us kind of bog-standard Jews make it in?

That is the sort of question that you ask. Only if you're pretty confident that you are one of the few who's going to get into the kingdom. Now it's very important, isn't it, that we engage with people's questions.

[10 : 43] But very often when people ask questions, you've got to admit that the purpose of the question is not to get an answer. It is to avoid facing the real issue.

But Jesus knows the answer that people need to the question. He knows that the answer that people need is to the question, not will few be saved, but will you be saved? That's the big issue. So he says, verse 24, look at verse 24. Strive to enter through the narrow door. Strive. It's an appeal for effort that hurts.

Strain. We actually get our word agonised from this word strain. It isn't strive, you know, you're eating cakes, aren't you? And there's one cake left and somebody says, go on, you have it. And you say, all right, I'll have it. It's not talking about that striving, kind of striving for a cream cake. It's the last lap of a very hard race. So verse 24 again.

[11 : 42] For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. I tell you, Jesus says, I want you to be in no doubt at all, there will be many people who will try to have a relationship with God and they will fail to make it.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. And he tells us they will fail. And the first reason they will fail is verse 25. Time is limited. Time is limited and that's why they'll fail.

When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door and you begin to stand outside and to knock the door saying, Lord, open to us, then he will answer you, I do not know where you come from. There's lots of jokes out there about Peter standing at the pearly gates as people arrive in heaven.

It's all very funny. Actually, Jesus says the entrance into heaven is no joke at all. And here he tells a story where there is a door, it's not a gate. And the master is standing at it and the door of the kingdom will be shut.

And once it's shut, it's shut. Jesus is pictured at the door of a house, a family, have all come home for the night. All the kids are in for the night.

[12 : 50] And suddenly there's some madman knocking at the door, three o'clock in the morning. The dad goes down and he opens the door, bizarrely, and the lunatic says, let me in. And what do you say?

He says, sorry mate, I don't know who you are. Clear off before I call the police. And you shut the door. I was on the E1 bus from E1 Broadway a couple of months ago.

And I went onto the top deck. And I sat behind Louie. He's not even the one of the Louie and Sharda. You know Louie. And so Louie had headphones in. And he was playing this computer

game.

And so I started saying behind him, Louie, Louie. And he didn't turn around. So I said it a bit louder. Louie. And still nothing. I thought I saw the kind of smirk of a smile in his face.

So I leaned forward on my seat, put my head in between his games console and his head. And went, Louie. And at that point, I found that it wasn't Louie.

[13 : 49] The young man told me to, off.

And I sat back in my seat. It was very embarrassing. No, for you, with that experience. You know what to do, isn't it, at that point? It's embarrassing.

Very embarrassing. I couldn't get off the bus quicker now. But I want you to notice, in this passage, it is not embarrassment. It is disaster. It is disaster. Because these people, they've rocked up to the door of heaven.

And they're pretty sure they're going to get in. They're taking it all. And Jesus said, I don't know where you come from. And the Bible teaches you that the day when Jesus returns will be the day when the day of opportunity for forgiveness.

And eternal life shuts. And it will be too late to make up your mind about him then. He is what history is about.

[14 : 55] He is what God is doing. His kingdom is what God is doing. And he is going to be the one everyone in eternity will know. And time is limited. So don't wait for tomorrow. The proverb says, boast not of tomorrow.

For you do not know what a day may bring forth. Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. That's the problem, isn't it? And the person you live with says, when are you going to do that?

You say, tomorrow. And they say, well, tomorrow never comes. Each day that we have is a day closer to that door shutting. Can I say to you, if you're not a Christian.

If you're not a follower of the Lord Jesus. If you're an interested observer. It is fantastic that you're here. But strive to enter. Find out more about Jesus. Yes, of course. But know this.

You do not have forever. One day. A day that could come. A day that will come without warning. A day that God has already set.

[15 : 52] A date that is in the diary of God will be too late. And you might say. Well, you might say, why?

You might say, I'm in church for goodness sake. But being in church is not enough. Well, the second problem. The second reason why the door is narrow. Because people have wrong presumptions.

People have wrong presumptions. Verse 26. Then you will begin to say. We ate and drank in your presence. And you taught in our streets.

The people outside the house. Have been hanging out with the owner of the house. They've been to the same parties. They've engaged him in conversation. Now we do know you, Jesus.

We know you. We went to church regularly. You came to our village. You taught in our synagogue. You were there. You came to our friend's house. We reclined at the same table. We had a dinner party together.

[16 : 52] We've heard what you have to say. They heard what you have to say. And they left thinking. What an interesting speaker. That rabbi was.

How thoughtful his subject material. And he's not even been properly trained. And they get on. And they live lives for themselves. That is the Jewish religious leaders of their day. They know so much about God.

But they do not know God. To the extent. When he was walking amongst them. In the person of his son. They didn't recognise him. They had the messianic CV.

Didn't they? They are the guys who could recite the Old Testament. Off by heart. And there's the Messiah. And verse 27. They reject him. They reject him.

Verse 27. But he will say. I tell you. I do not know where you come from. Depart from me. Or you workers of evil. There are no more terrible words to hear. To rock up at the door of heaven.

[17 : 51] Convince that you are a pious God fearer. And to be told that you are not known by God. The God that you think you follow. And actually. You are not a follower.

You are an evildoer. It is not enough to know about Jesus. Theology degree never saved anyone. You can recite the books of the Bible. Standing up on your head. But if you don't know Jesus Christ.

Or to put it in the more biblical way. He does not know you. Then you remain a rebel against him. Exposure. Does not equal.

A true relationship. To have never come to Jesus. And say. Lord. I am a sinner. And I desperately need you. As my saviour. Please take control of my life.

I am yours. So what we do. Is that we come to the Lord's table. What are we saying there? We come don't we. And we say. I am a sinner.

[18:47] It's a table for sinners. And I am desperately need you. As my saviour. Take control of my life. I am yours. Jesus graciously gives us.

This token of his love. And that he answers that. He gives bread and wine. It's not enough to know about Jesus. You need to know. Jesus. He says verse 24.

Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many I tell you will seek to enter and not be able. The final reason why it's urgent. The final reason why it's urgent.

Because the kingdom is important. Because the way is narrow. Is because the future depends on it. Look at verse 28. Look at verse 28. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

When you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And all the prophets in the kingdom of God. But you yourselves cast out. The Jews that Jesus is speaking to. They assumed that they would be in God's kingdom.

[19:49] Like their spiritual forefathers. Abraham and the lads. But Jesus says. You have rejected me. And because you rejected me.

Then you're going to have this dreadful experience. Of being so close and yet so far. Do you see the emphasis in verse 28? The end of the verse. It says. You yourselves.

Will be cast out. You yourselves. Will be cast out. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's really an expression of frustration. That is. When you realise you've made a dreadful mistake.

For these Jews. It's going to be the horror of realising. The Messiah that they were waiting for. Came. And they rejected him. And they will face an agony worse than you can ever imagine.

Because of the stupidity of their behaviour.

They will come under the judgement. And the punishment of a loving God. They will come under the judgement. Of a loving God. Who sent his one and only son.

[20:50] To die to take that punishment for them. And they rejected it. When they realised that Isaiah. Who they knew so well. And spoke of a suffering servant.

Who will die in the place of Israel. Was speaking about the very Jesus. That they've rejected all their life. And Jesus uses the horror.

Of finding out on judgement day. That you've rejected him. As the only hope. You had as a warning. You had a warning.

They haven't gone all the time in the world. To discuss theological niceties. I don't know whether you've had. Conversations about the gospel. And it reaches the point.

Where suddenly. Somebody catches on. To the message of the bible. People. And they say this. They say. So what you're saying is. If I don't believe this. If I don't accept this message.

[21:46] I will go to hell. You had that. And at that point. You squirm. Don't you. And you say. Yes. Well that is the sort of honesty.

You see coming from the lips of Jesus. In this passage. Here the message about Jesus. Is urgent. Because people are lost. Not just to the freedom he offers.

Which we saw last week. But to the eternal. And dreadful punishment. Of what is the camp. And a punishment that will start. With weeping. And gnashing of teeth.

That awful realisation. That I have rejected God's love. And the love of his one and only son. A love that is open to all. Look at verse 29. Look at verse 29.

And people will come from east and west. From north and south. And recline at the table. In the kingdom of God. They are standing there. Shut out. But in the meantime.

[22:42] People are streaming past them. From the four corners of the earth. Heaven will be full. In God's perfect new creation. There will be no shortage of people. God is not going to forget anyone.

There is not going to be a moment. When God says. Oh my goodness. Me. Look at the space over there. Where I forgot someone. Now it will be full. It is close. Isn't it? It is as close as Jesus gets.

To answering the question. In verse 23. Do you remember the question. Will few be saved? He says in verse 29. People will come from east and west. From north and south. And they will recline.

At the table of God. There will be vast numbers. East, west. South, north. They will come streaming in. The door is not narrow. Because only a few people.

Will go through it. The door is narrow. Because there is only one way to get in. There is only one way for a relationship. With God. And do you see this?

[23 : 41] They will feast in the kingdom of God. Do you see what is seen there in verse 29? They will recline at the table. It is a great picture of the banquet. It is a great picture of this marvellous feast.

That we will enjoy. It is a picture from Isaiah 25. When all the Lord's people. Will sit down for dinner. With the Lord himself. And he will serve them.

The picture of Jesus walking around. With a great bottle of wine. As they sit at the table. And as he pours out the drink. For you. And his blessings. Are being shared with the people. It is the picture of the greatest party.

Of all the parties. Where everyone will have that perfect. Loving relationship with God. And that perfect party. And we will be guests of honour. And we will see the Lord Jesus face to face. Again. It is what communion is a picture of. Isn't it? As we gather around this table. As we eat of the bread. As we drink of the wine. It says to you. There is a greater feast. That is to come in the kingdom of God.

[24 : 42] But the horror for the Jews. Is who is on the guest list. People from the four corners of the earth. People who are not Jews. People who have not had their great theological heritage.

They have not had that huge privilege. Of being part of the nation. That God lived with. In relationship with. Throughout all the pages of the Old Testament. And Jesus says in verse 30. He says.

And behold. Some of our last will be first. And some of our first will be lost. Those who have heard of God's loving grace. First. Well they are going to reject me.

Those who have got no history with God at all. Well they are going to accept me. Heaven will be full of the most unlikely characters. I often think. We will walk around the corridors of heaven.

And we will think. What on earth are you doing here? I never expected to see you. That's the same to us. Now why does Jesus use this story? What is Jesus trying to do?

[25 : 40] What is the tone of this passage? What is Jesus trying to do this morning? It's a good question to ask when you come to a passage. What is he trying to do? I want to say this. He's trying to unsettle you. In a good way.

I think he's trying to unsettle people. Who assume that heaven is a certainty. Because of who they are. Who presume on God's grace. There's a danger isn't there.

In the Christian life. Of living. Without looking to Christ. That is a disaster. And if you're not looking at Christ. Then there's only one person that you're looking at.

And it's yourself. And then you begin to be like these Jews. Who assume that they are good enough to get in. Don't deceive yourself. Strive to enter through the narrow door. And as we press on.

The news of this banquet should thrill us. This banquet is full of people from all over the world. Verse 29. They will come. And the people.

[26 : 38] They will come from east and west. And from north and south. And recline at the table. In the kingdom of God. Some of those who you thought.

Were beyond the reach of God's grace. That were beyond the message. Of the gospel. Well they'll be there. In verse 30. Let me warn you.

Some who've heard about Jesus from the cradle. Some who've had the enormous privilege. Of God's grace from birth. Well there's a danger that they won't be there.

Because some who are first. Will be last. Strive. Strive. To enter through the narrow door. For many I tell you.

Will seek to enter. And will not be able. Let's pray.