



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 13:18-35
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Heaven's Doorway

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

This morning we're going to continue on in the Gospel of Luke. And if you've been following with us at all you're probably getting the sense that the storm clouds are mounting. And there are little indicators along the way that Jesus is steadily making his way to Jerusalem and the end of his earthly ministry. So there seems to be a growing urgency and intensity in Jesus' actions and words. And this morning we come to one of most difficult passages for us to hear and really take in and digest. As I was studying this week I started thinking about my back yard. In my back yard on the side of the house, next to the tool shed there is a daily reminder of my own stubborn refusal to deal with reality (My wife just calls it stupidity). It's a rather ugly blue plastic 50 gallon water barrel that's been empty ever since we moved into our house over four years ago. We bought the barrel back in 1989 or '90 when the memories of the Loma Prieta earthquake were still fresh in my mind and experience. It was part of our earthquake preparedness; a supply of water that could carry a family of four for over a week if necessary. It seemed like a good idea at the time. But through the years it gathered alot of dust and was never put to use. It was always in the way and was impossible to move. So when we moved to our new home it was like a relic from the past. It just didn't seem to be as useful or necessary as it once was. So there it is, on the side of my house; blue and ugly and empty.

The U.S. geological survey tells me I'm a fool. The odds are over 2 to 1 that another magnitude 7.0 or above will hit the Bay Area sometime in the next 30 years. It's not a matter of "if," it's only a matter of "when." And this time it could hit under my house which I'm told, like all of Foster City is built on landfill that will shake like jello if it sustains a direct hit. But most of the time I just don't think about it. Occasionally when I'm mowing the lawn I complain about the ugly blue barrel or I think to myself...you know you really should fill that thing up. You just never know when the big one will hit. Then I go back inside and I conveniently forget about it, and I take care of more important things, like reading a magazine or watching a ball game, and just get preoccupied with things that are right in front of me.

I mention my blue barrel this morning because it's just a reminder to me of how easy it is to ignore the obvious, thinking we can put off the reality for another day or another week. I wonder how many of us tend to live our lives with the same kind of avoidance. Choosing

to ignore the reality that we are all, spiritually speaking, headed towards the big one. James puts it very bluntly; he says: **"What is your life, You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."** That's it. Here today, gone tomorrow. No one knows when it will happen but everyone knows that it will. The pulse will stop, the breathing will cease, and life as we know it will come to an end. And this morning we're going to hear Jesus, in his love for us, issue one of the strongest warnings in all of scripture, to be certain that we have prepared ourselves for what is to come.

I. The Growth of the Kingdom (Luke 13:18-21).

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

Now, before Jesus issues the warning he tells two parables or similes to let us know that the advance of the Kingdom is a sure and unstoppable thing. So he asks: What is the kingdom of God like? What can I compare it to? Jesus is really asking the question that is in the minds of everyone who has followed his ministry up to this point. You see, the Jews were waiting for the Messiah to bring the Kingdom in with military power. He was to be an impressive political force that rallied the troops of Israel. He was supposed to be a charismatic leader who would solidify the vision and reinvigorate the hopes of the nation. Jesus kept talking about the Kingdom, but it just didn't add up. They would think about the Messiah but then they would look at Jesus and shake their heads. Then they would look at this rag tag group of 12 uneducated nobodies and they wonder: "What's up with this Jesus? Where's the army, where's the military strategists, what's the plan for take over?"

A. Seed Power: So Jesus says, the Kingdom is like a mustard seed... it's a tiny little thing... it's unassuming, unimpressive, under rated. But look what happens when it grows. This tiny little insignificant seed grows into a huge bush or tree that is so big the birds can nest in its branches. Which is just an element in the story that tells us how big and substantial this thing is. This tiny

little seed will one day give shelter, protection, and food to the birds of the air. What an amazing thing.

Remember the woman who was healed that we looked at last week? This hunched over, no name woman was forever changed by the healing touch of Jesus. And remember, this was a picture of Christ's redeeming power and purpose. He says that's what the Kingdom is like. Its power to transform a life is astounding. And when it comes it changes everything and its power keeps on giving for generations to come.

B. Yeast Power: Then he says that the Kingdom is like leaven or yeast that spreads and eventually permeates the whole lump of dough. Yeast is a living organism that feeds on sugar and creates carbon dioxide that permeates the dough and makes it rise. I did my research in a baking book this week. It's amazing! You put this tiny amount of yeast in there and you think, now what's that going to do? But sure enough pretty soon its tiny presence expands until it affects the whole thing.

I thought a lot about this. What an encouraging word this is to us today. It tells us that the growth of the Kingdom is certain. It reminds us that gospel yeast has power to change lives; a person here and an individual there; and changed lives permeate society and transform the world. No matter how things might appear, make no mistake; the advance of the Kingdom of God is sure and unstoppable.

II. The Door to the Kingdom (22-30).

But Jesus says not everyone will be a part of the Kingdom. Not everyone will enter the Kingdom of God.

“And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. And someone said to Him, ‘Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?’ And He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.’”

So as they were moving closer to Jerusalem, there is another question that rises up, this time from some unidentified person in the crowd. And he asks: “Lord, are there just a few who are going to be saved?” This question also reflects one of the common beliefs of Jesus' day. The assumption is that every faithful Jew would automatically enter the Kingdom simply on the basis of his heritage. So this guy must have been thinking, “Well, I know I'm one of the saved. I have all my Jewish credentials and genealogy to back me up. So Jesus, are there many others like me who are qualified, or just a few?”

Now I want to look for a minute at Jesus' response and let it sink in. **“Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”**

A. The Narrow Door: So this guy apparently wants to engage Jesus in an abstract philosophical discussion about the number of those who will be saved. And what does Jesus do? He looks him straight in the eye and says, “No, let's talk about you. Here's what to think about. Strive to enter the narrow door.” The question is not “will the saved be few” but “will the saved be you?” Strive to enter. Some translations say “make every effort.” We get our word agonize from this Greek word. He says of all the questions in life here's the one question to agonize over. Let it get a hold of you, let it disturb you, let it keep you awake at night.

The question is about you ... and me... each one of us. Agonize over this. Will you enter through the narrow door? We don't like to hear this but Jesus makes it very clear that not everyone will enter the Kingdom. Only those who come through the narrow door will enter. He says, **“I tell you there will be many who will seek to enter but won't be able.”** We live in such a pluralistic “anything goes culture” that this message is absolutely hated today. But the Bible is clear on this. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus alone. Jesus himself is the narrow door. So he says “Agonize over this. Do you have a living, vital, love relationship with Jesus Christ?” Have you ever just opened your heart up to Jesus and said: “Lord, I need you, I'm a sinner, my life is messed up and frail, and self consumed. I'm so glad that you died for me on the cross, that you loved me so much you took my place and paid for my sin. And now I just want to love you, to talk with you, to let you into my life.” And we're to agonize over this not only because the door is narrow but also because it won't stay open forever.

B. The Closed Door: **“Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.’”**

None of us knows how or when, but we all know that it is coming. One day our lives will end or the Lord will return; either way, each of us will take that step into eternity when God, the head of the house, will slam the door shut and the time to enter through the narrow door will end. And when that happens there are going to be some who thought they would be inside who will be left outside. Then the pounding will begin. This is not a polite little knock on the door, this is frantic relentless pounding and crying out, “LORD LET US IN! You remember us. We were there when you preached, we saw you do miracles. Remember? We

were in the crowd. Let us in!" And the answer comes, "I don't even know you or where you are from. Get away from me you evil doers."

Jesus gives it to us straight. He says: Don't presume. Don't think that you'll enter the Kingdom because of your spiritual pedigree. The door is so narrow we can only come one at a time. You don't come holding your Grandma's hand. It's about your faith and your relationship with Christ. Don't presume you'll enter because you went to church, or read your bible, or listened to sermons, or preached sermons; don't think that because you've had a prominent place in life you get an automatic pass into the kingdom. Don't be fooled into thinking that just because you've been a good person, or because you have sincere beliefs, or because you have religious feelings that you'll enter in. He says "No, there will be many who will try to enter through other means but it's only those who come by way of the narrow door of relationship with Me who will enter in." It's not whether or not you know about Jesus but does Jesus know you? Does he have a personal relationship with you? Do you love him? Have you humbly surrendered your life to him and begun a living intimate relationship with the Christ?

About eight years ago I traveled to Greece and Albania with Jack Murray, our missions pastor. We had an amazing time traveling out of country visiting several missionaries, seeing what the Lord was doing in these far away places on the globe. But when we returned we had a layover in Detroit. And because it was our first stop back into the U.S. we had to go through customs. So I was in line with my U.S. passport and went right through, but Jack, who was in the process of getting permanent residency here in the U.S., was in line with his passport from England. And the customs officer seized his passport and kept him in his office and threatened to deport him back to England where he came from. Now I'm glad to say that that situation worked its way out and after a bit of delay Jack was on the next plane and returned here to California.

But you know what, after that incident, every time I travel I make absolutely sure that I've got everything in order because I don't want to be standing in line when somebody pulls me aside and says "excuse me, you don't belong here. We can't let you in. We don't even know who you are or where you're from."

The really amazing thing about this Kingdom is that everyone is invited to come. The immigration department doesn't care who enters... from every tribe and nation; from every people group ever known, the rich and the poor; the Kingdom of God is open to all. But everyone who would come must enter through the same narrow door of relationship with Jesus Christ. And then he gives us one of the most horrific pictures in all of the bible.

"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 yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

Those who choose to pass by the narrow door will remain outside of the kingdom; but apparently you'll still be able to look inside. And there will be weeping, sobbing that will not end; and the gnashing of teeth, which is an expression of anger and rage where you clench your jaw and grind your teeth. And your anger won't subside because you'll look in and see the banquet, the feast, the celebration where the fathers of Israel; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with the prophets are rejoicing in the presence of Christ. You'll be outside and as you watch you notice others will come, other no name nobodies; from every tribe and nation (north, south, east and west). Some who thought they'd be the first in the door won't be there but others, the very least, the unassuming, the humble, the woman with the twisted spine, she'll be there. Not because they were impressive but because they chose to love Jesus with all their hearts. You see it but it's too late, there's nothing you can do. The door is closed, the time to choose salvation has come to an end.

That's a terrible picture isn't it. But sit with it for a minute. What if that were you? The sorrow never ends, the anger never subsides... and you look on; and you see your loved ones who knew Jesus, and there they are, at the celebration of the Lamb; with you outside, weeping, pounding your fist; but nothing will ever change. That's the picture Jesus wants us to ponder this morning because he knows how desperately we try to avoid this reality. It's a very disturbing thing to consider.

When we come across a passage like this, often times the question is raised, so how can a loving and gracious God send people to hell? But the truth is, God doesn't send anyone to hell. We send ourselves there. It doesn't take massive, horrendous acts of sin to wind up in hell; all you have to do is pass by the narrow door. All you have to do is reject the person and work of Jesus Christ. Push away Christ and his saving grace and you'll secure your place outside the kingdom of God forever. The apostle Paul says this about people who have chosen to shut God out of their lives: **"Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools"** (Rom 1:21-22).

We're all on a journey towards our eternity. We're all aging, we're all moving through life, we go through various ages and stages; and somewhere along the journey we hear about God's mercy and grace. We

bump into a sermon, or a Christian friend at work who tells us about God's forgiveness. We hear about God's pardon for my sin through the witness of a church. And some, by the grace of God, fall on their faces and invite Jesus into their lives and begin a relationship with him. And that decision changes the course of their eternity. But others choose to reject the cross and trample over his offer of saving grace. Several years ago after Billy Graham conducted one of his crusades in Melbourne, Australia, a woman wrote a letter of complaint to one of the local newspapers: *"After hearing Billy Graham on the air... I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul (and everyone else's) needs saving - whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost. Nor do I feel that I wallow in the mire of sin, although his preaching insists that I do. Give me practical religion that teaches gentleness and kindness and not about sin. If, in order to save my soul, I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned."*

You know, I think this may be why Jesus says to agonize. There is something so painful about repentance, about confessing that we are sinners in need of a savior. So some like this woman hear the message of the cross and stiffen up inside and say, "No, it's not for me, it's not my time. I'm not ready to give in. I've got my pride. I won't repent, I will not bow." Some of you here today have bumped into God's grace so many times, Sunday after Sunday, but you still take a big step over the cross of Christ and just keep on going.

So Jesus in his love for you this morning gives a warning and leaves us with this horrifying picture of what happens for those who choose to reject him. And I believe that Jesus shakes us up today because he just loves each one of us so very much. The apostle Peter says that **"the Lord does not wish that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance"** (2 Pet. 3:9).

He loves you. He doesn't want you to perish. He wants you with him in the Kingdom. It's so important for us to grasp that this morning.

III. The Heart of the King: (31-35).

Verse 31 says that **"some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, 'Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You.'"** That may sound a little strange given the general reputation of the Pharisees, but we do know that not all of the Pharisees were against Jesus. In fact some appear to be supportive and sympathetic to his cause. It must have been the case with those who warned him that Herod was out to kill him. So they encourage him to run for his life. But Jesus is determined to carry out the Father's will. **"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 reach My goal.'" Which is a veiled reference of course to the victory of his resurrection power when he was raised from the dead on the third day. And he says, in a sort of sarcastic tone to the self righteous, **"Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem."** He says: I'm going to Jerusalem where you have killed all the other prophets. God forbid that you would execute me someplace other than Jerusalem. So we see it again. Jesus has made a determined, daily commitment to go to Jerusalem to die on the cross in our place.

But this is what I want us to see as we close this morning. And this is so important. Jesus is not a dispassionate, callous, stoic judge who stands at the gates and tells us where to go. No. Jesus identifies himself with the words of the prophets who wept and prayed, and pleaded with Israel to repent and come to him. He cries out: **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!"**

You hear that? That's the heart of Jesus calling out today. He says: O Denise, O John... How many times I've wanted to gather you in. I've been pursuing you. I've been calling out to you your whole life. I want to give you a place of shelter and safety and protection under my wings, don't keep running away. That's God's heart for you.

I don't do well with heights. Actually I'm not bad by myself but I can't stand watching someone I love up on a high ladder or put their toes over the edge of a cliff. And it used to freak me out especially when my kids were little. I remember one summer when my son was around five we went to Yosemite and hiked up the Vernal Falls trail. If you've ever been on that trail you know how dangerous it is. It's carved into the cliff in places, it's slippery and if you lost your footing you would be immediately swallowed up in a torrent of freezing water. There's no way you could survive. And I remember trying to maintain my cool as I watched my son on the trail. But at some point he decided it would be fun to skip down the trail, you know, just completely unaware of any danger! My heart was pounding and this surge of panic hit my throat and I screamed at the top of my lungs: STOP! Watch where you're going! And he froze in his tracks and I could tell he was a shaken up. But at that moment all I wanted to do was to scoop him up and hold him and know that he was safe.

It strikes me that this is one of those days where some of you have bumped into the cross of Christ again. And you have a choice to make this morning. You can choose to stiffen up inside and step over the cross again, rejecting his love and his mercy. But know this, the heart of Jesus is filled with forgiveness and grace, and he's aching for you to come under the safety of his wings.

But I also know that many in this room have already come through the narrow door and you know the love of Christ, and you're looking forward to the day when the sorrows of this life come to an end and you enter into the celebration of all eternity. That's great! But as we rejoice let us also ask: "Lord, break my heart for the lost." I don't know about you, but I get so self consumed sometimes; I think it's just all about me when it's really all about him and his Kingdom. So "teach us to number our days and make us a fragrant aroma of Christ for all those who stand outside the narrow door."

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