

Luke 13:22-35

God's Kingdom and the Surprise of Salvation

There is a Sunday worship experience that has been engrained in my memory from when I was a young believer. It was an ordinary Sunday. We sang worship songs, the congregation seemed mildly happy. Then something caught us by surprise. An associate pastor was filling the pulpit that morning. At one point he said something like this: "I believe that there are some serious sin issues in the lives of some in this church that the Lord is going to deal with very soon." In most churches that would catch us by surprise.

Our church was caught by surprise a few months later when the Sr. Pastor made the front page of the major Pittsburgh newspaper for a scandal that cost him the ministry and reputation.

The way that the Kingdom of God works catches many by surprise. Some of what Jesus says often catches us by surprise if we listen thoughtfully.

There is an element of surprise that runs through our passage.

1. The surprising minimalism of salvation (22-28)

- Jesus continues on his journey to Jerusalem. The cross continues to be on the horizon.
- In v23 we encounter someone with a question, "will those who are saved be few"?
- The problem is we don't know the heart behind the question. Is he self-righteous, or concerned for himself and family? Does he look at his fellow Israelite neighbor and think, "Really?"
- It's a legit question. One we may ask. There is so much evil in the world. We know the junk in our own hearts.

- Jesus does not give a “yes” or “no” rather he gives instruction that *stresses personal responsibility*— “Strive to enter the narrow door.”
- In other words, don’t be concerned about the number, rather be concerned you are among the numbered.

The word strive refers to *wholehearted action*. It’s a word that is used in athletics or combat and where we get the word *agonize* from. It’s about mindset and attitude. It asks the question, will you do what is necessary to achieve victory? Striving weeds out any thoughts of half-hearted devotion.

Would you rather play for a coach who pats you on the back and says “good effort” after you lose every game? Or the coach who puts you through agonizing discipline, but your team is victorious?

- The door is a picture of the opportunity for salvation, and Jesus’ point is that the opportunity to respond does not go on forever.

So, don’t minimize the opportunity God has in front of you today.

Don’t keep postponing and procrastinating making Jesus your Lord.

Time is short. The door may close sooner than we think.

(13:5) “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”

- This seems to be a blend of what is found in Matt 7:13-14; Mt 25:10.

No doubt this surprise applied to the Jewish listeners who assumed that by birthright—by ethnicity—that it made someone among the elect. You could just play the Hebrew privilege card. If you were a Jew you had the temple, law, and covenants, right? But Jesus’ teaching is different. Jesus calls followers to serious effort at repenting and following him in close discipleship.

Nowhere in the Bible do we ever see that being a Christ follower is easy or minimalistic. What is minimalistic is the people who actually show up and follow through. No one will enter the Kingdom as a casual observer.

Secondly, it is clear that Jesus controls the eternal destinies of all peoples. A person's eternal destiny hangs on whether or not on the final day of judgment Jesus will say: "I know you."

2. The surprising multitude of salvation (29-30)

- The second surprising thing Jesus says about salvation is how broad in scope it is.
- It would have been very surprising for a Jew to hear that they had the potential of being cast out of the kingdom.
- It would have been even more scandalous for a Jew to hear that *many* non-Jews will have a place in God's Kingdom.

This mindset is still true today to some extent. I had an OT prof. in seminary who would go to Israel to do archeology digs in the summer. This man was as un-Jewish looking as you can get. Very fair skin, blonde, bright blue eyes. Fit well in northern Europe, not in Israel. One day as he was walking down the street in Jerusalem, he heard an orthodox Jewish man say very loudly *goyim*.

That's the Hebrew word for Gentile. Since my OT prof. knew Hebrew well, he understood that it was not a compliment.

Here is the reality: unless this ethnically Jewish man has a change of heart, he will be in for big surprise when he discovers a multitude of *goyim* are part of God's kingdom because of Jesus the Messiah.

- That is the surprising punch (V29-30), some who are last will be first and the first last. Many Gentiles will be included and many unbelieving Israel will be excluded.

In fact the Bible says that God shows no favoritism to any ethnic group or people. The people of his kingdom are those who happily bow the knee to Jesus Messiah now. Therefore, be careful you do not miss your opportunity and miss what God is doing. Missing your opportunity means not responding to Jesus in faith, worship, love, and obedience. Not seeing the glory of who he is and desiring to live under his rule. Missing what God is doing is forgetting that God's heart is a heart for the nations.

If God's kingdom includes a multitude from every tribe, tongue and nation. How will they come?

Paul gives us an answer in Rom 10:12-15

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

May God keep us from being a church that misses what he is doing.

In light of the surpassing multitude of salvation, we need to be about the hard work of making disciples and then willingly releasing them in strategic ways to reach the nations.

3. The surprising way of salvation (31-33)

- As Jesus is in the thick of active ministry, he gets a warning - (v31) "Get lost. Herod is out to get you."
- Actually, the surprising factor is the source...the Pharisees.
- This shows that some Pharisees were sympathetic to Jesus. God will use a converted Pharisee to be one of the strongest gospel preaching church planting leaders in the history of the church. God's grace often comes by great surprise.
- But again we find another surprising part. *Death is actually God's plan for Jesus.*
- Jesus is not trying to flee death at all costs, rather he embraces it.
- Two things to note:

First, the courage (v32). Jesus has calm, unshaken confidence when he says, "Go and tell that fox."

The analogy of the fox describes someone who thinks they are powerful (lionlike) but are actually much smaller and insignificant.

They are more of an insignificant nuisance—not a major power factor.

Herod is not the major power factor he thinks he is.

Second, Jesus is the one in absolute control.

Jesus has a mission to complete.

- The reference to 3 days here certainly has a resurrection ring to it.

Without saying it explicitly, Christ's full redemptive work is in view here. Which means that God, not Herod, has control of the future and knows exactly what he is doing. *It's his plan to save a people by crushing his Son.*

The cross is the surprising way of salvation. We may not appreciate that with 2000 years of church history. To identify with Christ you wear a cross. But that was not the mindset when Jesus walked the earth. Triumphant kings don't get crucified. But God's way of victory often surprises.

4. The surprising hard hearts of people close to Jesus (34-35)

- The final item of surprise is not from Jesus, but from people close to him.
- Our text ends with a picture of Jesus weeping over the city Jerusalem. It is certainly one of the great pictures of Christ's *compassion for lostness*.
- Here we see Jesus as the broken-hearted prophet who sheds tears over the lost condition of many hard-hearted people
- Which leaves us with a final comment (v35)—quoting Ps 118:26
- Many see this as a reference to either the triumphal entry or second coming.
- But the context of Ps 118 is that it's a Psalm of thanksgiving, worshiping the God who delivers. It's positive, faith driven text.

People will not see Jesus (as Messiah-deliverer) until they are able to say: Yes! He is the fulfillment of the Lord's promises. In other words, you are not able to see Jesus for who he is until you say (by faith) that he is God's promised Redeemer-Messiah.

Conclusion

There seems to be at least 3 calls of response to the Word today.

- 1) A call out to those who have been near to the things of Jesus but still don't really care. Strive to enter the narrow door *now*. Realize the seriousness that time may run out. The door of mercy and grace is open today. But there will be a time when it is too late.
- 2) A call to see that the cross is the *only* way of salvation. There may be someone here not totally convinced of that. The kingdom of God is made up of beggars who are broken and humble at the foot of the cross.
- 3) A call to see and *love* the type of refuge Jesus provides. Through the lips of Jesus we have another reminder that he is the Lord God and he offers the sovereign shelter of God. He is capable and willing to receive all who take refuge in him.

(Ps 57:1) Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by.