

# CONCERNING THE WAY

April 3, 2012

## LESSON 134: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



### Chapter 13

**Luke 13:1-3** At that time, some people who were there told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. (2) He asked them, "Do you think that these Galileans were more sinful than all the other Galileans because they suffered like this? (3) Absolutely not, I tell you! But if you don't repent, then you, too, will all die. (4) What about those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? (5) Absolutely not, I tell you! But if you don't repent, then you, too, will all die."

- We don't know the history of the events Jesus mentioned, but apparently the rumor going around was that these people that were killed had done something to deserve it. The problem Jesus was addressing was the Jews long history of connecting sin and suffering. They just assumed that if something bad happened to you, you must have done something to bring it on yourself.
- Jesus says absolutely that these people did not die because of something they did. Being killed or not being killed is not an indicator of a person's unrighteousness or righteousness. Anyone can be killed. Only God's grace causes anyone to live. But he tells the people that if they don't repent, they will die, too. Jesus was looking into the future to the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in A.D. 70 (see Luke 21:21-24). He was telling them that if they kept rejecting God and the Messiah He had sent, then Rome would eventually come and obliterate them, and that's exactly what happened 40 years later.
- It is always dangerous to connect human suffering to human sin; but it is always true that the nation which rebels against God is on the way to disaster. Do you agree with this statement?

**Luke 13:6-9** Then Jesus told them this parable: "A man had a fig tree that had been planted in his vineyard. He went to look for fruit on it but didn't find any. (7) So he said to the gardener, 'Look here! For three years I have been coming to look for fruit on this tree but haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it waste the soil?' (8) But the gardener replied, 'Sir, leave it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and fertilize it. (9) Maybe next year it'll bear fruit. If not, then cut it down.'"

- God had been patiently waiting for many years for Israel to turn back to God in repentance, start producing good fruit, but the time was coming, like the fig tree, that it would be cut down.
- America has been greatly blessed by God because it has produced good fruit for Him. But that tree seems to be drying up. Like Israel, will this country be eventually cut down because it has become useless?
- The question we have to ask ourselves, of course, is, given the skills and opportunities that God has given us, have we done anything useful in this world? What will you answer if God asks you this

question at the end of your life, "What did you do for me?" We have inherited a Christian civilization and a freedom which we did not create. We have a duty of handing things on to our children better than we found them, and we are failing at that responsibility.

- God always gives people chance after chance. But the parable makes it clear that there is a final chance. If we refuse chance after chance to turn to God in repentance, the day will come not when God has shut us out, but when we by our choice have shut ourselves out. God save us from that!

**Luke 13:10-17** Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. (11) A woman was there who had a spirit that had disabled her for eighteen years. She was hunched over and completely unable to stand up straight. (12) When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, "**Woman, you are free from your illness.**" (13) Then he placed his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. (14) But the synagogue leader, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, told the crowd, "There are six days when work is to be done. So come on those days to be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." (15) The Lord replied to him, "**You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey and lead it out of the stall to give it some water? (16) Shouldn't this woman, a descendant of Abraham whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (17) Even as he was saying this, all of his opponents were blushing with shame. But the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things he was doing.**

- This is the last time we hear of Jesus being in a synagogue. By this time the religious leaders were watching His every move and waiting to pounce on Him whenever they got the chance. Notice the synagogue leader didn't even have the guts to question Jesus directly, he spoke to the crowd.
- You were not allowed to do any work on the Sabbath, and technically healing was considered work, so Jesus broken the Law of the Sabbath. But Jesus turned the Law back on them to tell them how stupid they were being. It was allowable to take care of your animals on the Sabbath, so how could it be wrong to help a sick woman who had suffered for so long?
- This synagogue leader was one of those guys that care more that the people obey their petty little rules than they do about the people themselves, and this has always been a problem. There are many church people who are more concerned with the method of church government or their cherished traditions than they are with the worship of God and serving people.

**Luke 13:18-19** So Jesus went on to say, "**What is the kingdom of God like? What can I compare it to? (19) It is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds in the sky nest in its branches.**"

- In the Middle East mustard is not a garden herb but a tree. It starts from one of the tiniest little seeds, and grows to as much as 12-15 feet high. It is common to see a cloud of birds around those trees, because they love the tiny little black mustard seeds.
- In the middle east the common symbol of a great empire was a mighty tree; and the subject nations who found shelter and protection under it were symbolized by birds in the branches (compare Ezekiel 31:6; Ezekiel 17:23). Jesus' point is that the kingdom of God will grow into a vast empire in which all kinds of men and nations will come together and will find the shelter and the protection of God.

**Luke 13:20-21** Again he said, "What can I compare the kingdom of God to? (21) It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

- Jesus' point here is that the kingdom will permeate everything. But there are lessons we can learn from this as well:
  - The leaven is very small but it changes the whole character of the dough. In the place where we work or live we may be the only professing Christians; if that's the case, it is our responsibility to be the leaven of the kingdom there.
  - The kingdom of God works from the inside. As long as the leaven was outside the dough it couldn't change the dough at all; it had to get inside. We can never change people from the outside. New houses, new conditions, better material things only change the surface.
  - You can tell the leaven is working because it makes the dough bubble and foam. So, the leaven is like the disturbing power of Christianity. In Thessalonica it was said about the Christians, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). True religion never makes people comfortable; never makes them quietly accept the evil that should be stood against. Real Christianity causes revolution in the individual life and in society. The kingdom of God is the leaven which fills a person with both the peace of God and with the "divine discontent" which will not rest from doing His work until He comes.

**Luke 13:22-30** Then Jesus taught in one town and village after another as he made his way to Jerusalem. (23) Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, (24) "Keep on struggling to enter through the narrow door. For I tell you that many people will try to enter but won't be able to. (25) After the homeowner gets up and closes the door, you can stand outside, knock on the door, and say again and again, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will answer you, 'I don't know where you come from.' (26) Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' (27) But he will tell you, 'I don't know where you come from. Get away from me, all you evildoers!' (28) In that place there will be crying and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves being driven away on the outside. (29) People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. (30) You see, some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last."

- To understand the "narrow door" reference it's helpful to look at the historical context. The narrow door in a household compound was the smaller entrance for family, servants, and personal guests. It was locked and barred at night. The large door to the compound was wide so that animals and wagons could go through. Jesus, speaking to His fellow Jews, is telling them to make sure they are really one of the family, someone the homeowner knows. Otherwise, they will not be allowed in.
- These words would have been a surprise to Jesus' hearers. Most of them assumed that because they were physically related to Abraham they would naturally enter into the kingdom. But His next words were even more devastating to those who assumed that only the Jewish nation would be involved in the kingdom. Jesus explained that Gentiles would be added to the kingdom in place of Jewish people (verses 29-30). People coming from the four corners of the world represent various population groups. They should not have been surprised by this teaching because the prophets had often said the same

thing. But Jews in Jesus' day believed that Gentiles were inferior to them. The Jewish people considered themselves to be first in every way, but they would be last, that is, most of them would be left out of the kingdom. In contrast, some Gentiles, considered last, would be in the kingdom and would really be first in importance (13:30). So, what do you think Jesus' implied answer was?

**Luke 13:31-35** At that hour some Pharisees came and told Jesus, "Leave and get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you!" (32) He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Listen! I am driving out demons and healing today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work. (33) But I must be on my way today, tomorrow, and the next day, for it's not possible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' (34) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones to death those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you didn't want to! (35) Look! Your house is left to you deserted. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'How blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

- We don't know if this was the Pharisees just trying to keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem, or if they were Pharisees that actually supported Him. Not all the Pharisees were hostile to Jesus. There may have been six bad Pharisees for every good one; but even among the Pharisees there were those who admired and respected Jesus. Can you name any of them?
- Jesus wasn't meaning three literal days here, He was just saying that He had a mission to accomplish and nothing and nobody was going to stop it. In "the third day I will finish my work", what do you think Jesus is referring to?
- At this point Luke gives us Jesus' lament for Jerusalem, essentially saying that, because they have rejected God by rejecting Him and the prophets that have been sent to her, God was rejecting her. Matthew places this after the Triumphal entry into Jerusalem, after He has presented Himself as Messiah to the nation. That may make more sense time-wise.
- Jesus said (quoting Psalm 118:26) that the people of the city would not see Him again till they said that He was the Messiah. The crowd did quote this verse when Jesus entered the city in His Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:38), but their religious leaders did not accept Him. Eventually this truth will be proclaimed when Jesus comes again and enters Jerusalem as the millennial Ruler and King of Kings.

## Chapter 14

**Luke 14:1-6** One Sabbath, Jesus went to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal. The guests were watching Jesus closely. (2) A man whose body was swollen with fluid suddenly appeared in front of him. (3) So Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" (4) But they kept silent. So he took hold of the man, healed him, and sent him away. (5) Then he asked them, "If your son or ox falls into a well on the Sabbath day, you would pull him out immediately, wouldn't you?" (6) And they couldn't argue with him about this.

- Yet another Sabbath issue – this was really a hot button among the Pharisees that Jesus loved to push! In the gospel story there are seven incidents in which Jesus healed on the Sabbath day (Luke 4:38, Luke 6:6, Luke 13:13, John 5:9, John 9:14, Mark 1:21).

- Every miracle of healing that Jesus did on the Sabbath day only made the scribes and Pharisees more certain that he was dangerous and blasphemous and must at all costs be stopped. It is important to remember that the orthodox Jews of His day considered him a law-breaker. He healed on the Sabbath; so he worked on the Sabbath; so he broke the law. This was not God's intent for the Sabbath law!
- On this occasion a Pharisee invited him to a meal on the Sabbath. The law had its meticulous regulations about Sabbath meals. Of course no food could be cooked on the Sabbath; that would have been to work. All food had to be cooked on the Friday before; and, if it was necessary to keep it hot, it must be kept hot in such a way that it was not cooked any more! So the (manmade) laws said that food to be kept warm for the Sabbath must not be put into "oil dregs, manure, salt, chalk or sand, whether moist or dry, nor into straw, grape-skins, flock or vegetables, if these are damp, though it may be if they are dry. It may be, however, put into clothes, amidst fruits, pigeons' feathers and flax tow." It was the obeying of regulations like this that the Pharisees considered true religion. No wonder they could not understand Jesus!
- Without hesitation Jesus healed the man. He knew perfectly well what they were thinking; and he quoted their own law and practice to them. Open wells were quite common in Palestine, and were fairly often the cause of accidents. It was perfectly allowable to rescue an animal which had fallen in. Jesus demands how, if it be right to help an animal on the Sabbath, it can be wrong to help a man.

**Luke 14:7-11** When Jesus noticed how the guests were choosing the places of honor, he told them a parable. (8) "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, don't sit down at the place of honor in case someone more important than you was invited by him. (9) Then the host who invited both of you would come to you and say, 'Give this person your place.' In disgrace, you would have to take the place of least honor. (10) But when you are invited, go and sit down at the place of least honor. Then, when your host comes, he will tell you, 'Friend, move up higher,' and you will be honored in the presence of all who eat with you. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the person who humbles himself will be exalted."

- Jesus is simply saying here that we should not seek honor for ourselves, but be humble, and God will reward you someday with honor which is far more valuable than man's honor.
- We can learn humility by realizing the facts. However much we know, we still know very little compared with the sum total of knowledge. However much we have achieved, we still have achieved very little in the end. However important we may believe ourselves to be, when we die or when we retire from our careers, life and work will go on just the same. We're just not "all that".
- We can also gain humility by comparison with the perfect. It is when we see or hear the expert that we realize how poor our own performance is. Hearing a master musician perform makes us wannabe musicians never want to perform in front of people again. And if we set our lives beside the life of the Lord Jesus, if we compare our performance with the way He perfectly obeyed the will of the Father, our pride will die and our self-satisfaction will be shriveled up.

**Luke 14:12-14** Then he told the man who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, stop inviting only your friends, brothers, relatives, or rich neighbors. Otherwise, they may invite you in return and you would be repaid. (13) Instead, when

**you give a banquet, make it your habit to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. (14) Then you will be blessed because they can't repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."**

- Then Jesus spoke to His host, telling him that if he would invite the outcasts of society (the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind)—people who could never repay him for his generosity—this would show that he was ministering to them for the Lord's sake and not his own (also Matthew 6:1-18; James 1:26-27). He would be laying up for himself treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20) and would be becoming rich toward God (Luke 12:21). Reward would not come immediately but at the resurrection of the righteous.

**Luke 14:15-24** Now one of those eating with him heard this and said to him, "How blessed is the person who will eat in the kingdom of God!" (16) Jesus said to him, "A man gave a large banquet and invited many people. (17) When it was time for the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come! Everything is now ready.' (18) Every single one of them began asking to be excused. The first said to him, 'I bought a field, and I need to go out and inspect it. Please excuse me.' (19) Another said, 'I bought five pairs of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' (20) Still another said, 'I recently got married, and that's why I can't come.' (21) "So the servant went back and reported this to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and told his servant, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring back the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' (22) The servant said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' (23) Then the master told the servant, 'Go out into the streets and the lanes and make the people come in, so that my house may be full. (24) For I tell all of you, none of those men who were invited will taste anything at my banquet.'"

- The Jews believed that when God broke into history and the days of the new kingdom age arrived, He would give a great feast to his own people - this is the banquet that the man who spoke to Jesus was thinking of. When he spoke of the happiness of those who would be guests at that banquet he was thinking of Jews, and of Jews only, because the average, orthodox Jew would never have dreamed that gentiles and sinners would find a place at the feast of God. That is why Jesus spoke this parable.
- In Israel, when a person planned a banquet, the day was announced long before and the invitations were sent out and accepted; but the time was not announced; and when the day came and all things were ready, servants were sent out to summon the already invited guests. To accept the invitation beforehand and then to refuse it when the day came was a serious insult.
- In the parable the master stands for God. The originally invited guests stand for the Jews. Throughout all their history they had looked forward to the day when God would break in on history again; and when he did (with the coming of Jesus), they tragically refused his invitation. The poor people from the streets and lanes stand for the tax-gatherers and sinners who welcomed Jesus in a way in which the orthodox never did. Those gathered in from the roads and the hedges stand for the gentiles. When the Jews refused God's invitation and left his table empty, the invitation went out to the gentiles.
- Even though the people in this parable that refused the master's invitation are the Jews, we have the same thing going on today. In the parable the invited guests made their excuses and men's excuses aren't much different today.

- The first man said that he had bought a field and was going to see it. He allowed the claims of business to be more important than the claims of God. A person can be so immersed in this world that he has no time to worship, and no time to pray.
- The second man said that he had bought five yoke of oxen and that he was going to try them out. He let the excitement of something new be more important to him than the claims of Christ. It often happens that when we buy something new that we've really wanted, we get so involved with it that the things of God get crowded out. It is very easy for a new car, a new gadget, a new hobby, even a new friendship, to take up the time that should be kept for God.
- The third man said, "I have married a wife, and I cannot come." One of the wonderful merciful laws of the Old Testament says this, "When a man is newly married, he need not go into the army nor be obligated in any way; he must be free to stay at home for a full year and bring joy to the wife he has married." (Deuteronomy 24:5). Even good things crowd out the claims of God. There is nothing wrong with getting married and having a home but yet a home was never meant to be used selfishly.
- Before we leave this passage we must notice that Luke 14:1-24 is all about feasts and banquets. We must always remember that Jesus thought of the kingdom in terms of a feast. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. There is no healthy pleasure which is forbidden to a Christian, for a Christian is like a person who is forever at a wedding feast.

**Luke 14:25-33** Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus. He turned and said to them, **(26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, as well as his own life, he can't be my disciple. (27) Whoever doesn't carry his cross and follow me can't be my disciple. (28) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. He will first sit down and estimate the cost to see whether he has enough money to finish it, won't he? (29) Otherwise, if he lays a foundation and can't finish the building, everyone who watches will begin to ridicule him (30) and say, 'This person started a building but couldn't finish it.' (31) "Or suppose a king is going to war against another king. He will first sit down and consider whether with 10,000 men he can oppose the one coming against him with 20,000 men, won't he? (32) If he can't, he will send a delegation to ask for terms of peace while the other king is still far away. (33) In the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions."**

- Keep in mind that when Jesus said this he was on the road to Jerusalem. He knew that he was on his way to the cross; the crowds who were with him thought that he was on his way to establishing an empire. Ultimately everyone did desert Him when He was alone in the garden and then arrested and put on trial. That is why he spoke to them like this. In the most vivid way possible he told them that the man who followed him was not on the way to worldly power and glory, but must be ready to sacrifice the things that meant most to him in life and for a suffering which could lead to an agonizing death.
- It is obvious that the Lord was using the term "hate" in only a relative sense—that is, in relation to your love for God and His will. Jesus has commanded us to "love your neighbor" (Matthew 22:39) and even to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44), so it is obvious that we are to love our families. But love for God should be supreme (Luke 10:27). Our loyalty to Jesus must come before our loyalty to our family or to our own life.

- There are six references to the Christian, like Christ, taking up his cross and carrying it to the place of execution (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23; 14:27). Taking one's cross means more than the ordinary trials and troubles of life, which are common to everyone. It means literally being willing to lay down your life because of your love and loyalty to Christ.
- Is it possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple? One of the downfalls of the church is that there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.
- It is a Christian's first duty to count the cost of following Christ. Jesus taught that discipleship must include planning and sacrifice. The first illustration was a tower (verses 28-30). Before a person begins to build, he should be sure he will be able to pay the full cost of the project. Jesus' followers must also be sure they are willing to pay the full price of discipleship.
- If a person is overwhelmed by the high demands of Christ let him remember that we are not left to fulfill them alone. He who called us to the steep road and the narrow way will walk with us every step of the way and be there at the end to meet us.

**Luke 14:34-35 "Now, salt is good. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can its flavor be restored? (35) It is suitable neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. People throw it away. Let the person who has ears to hear, listen!"**

- Jesus uses salt as a symbol of the Christian life. In Israel it had three characteristic uses.
  - Salt was used as a preservative. It is the earliest of all preservatives. Without salt food decayed and went bad; with it its freshness was preserved. That means that true Christianity must act as a preservative against the corruption of the world. The individual Christian must be the conscience of his neighbors; and the church the conscience of the nation. He should be like a cleansing antibacterial wipe. The church must fearlessly speak against all evils and support all good causes.
  - Salt was used as a flavoring. Food, without salt, can be disgustingly bland. The Christian, then, must be the person who brings flavor to life. The Christian who acts like a gloomy Gus and a wet blanket is not a true Christian. The Christian is the person who, by their courage, their hope, their cheerfulness and their kindness brings a new flavor to life.
  - Salt was used on the land. It was used to make it easier for all good things to grow. The Christian must be the kind of person that makes it easier for people to be good and harder to be bad. We all know people that when we're around them we are inspired to do better things and not do other things. We also know people that, when we are with them we might stoop to do things which by ourselves we would not and should not do. The Christian must be like a breath of heaven where the good things thrive and the evil things shrivel up.
- That is the function of the Christian; if he fails in that function, if he loses that saltiness, there is no reason why he should exist at all; and we have already seen that uselessness can turn into disaster. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.
- These are all very sobering statements of Jesus that should convict us, wake us up. Of course, we cannot obey these commands of the Lord without His help, something we need to be on our knees asking for every day.