

When the people of Israel came to Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God, it must have been a terrifying experience. The mountain was surrounded by darkness and a thick cloud as God descended upon that mountain. There was thunder and lightning and the whole mountain trembled violently. The sound of a trumpet grew louder and louder. God told the people that they could not even touch the mountain or they would die. This entire scene was to show the people that God was holy and righteous and that they had to remain separate from him because of their sin. Even though this was terrifying for the people who witnessed it, it is nothing in comparison to what awaits those who do not believe in Jesus as their Savior. Because God loves us and does not want us to go to eternal damnation, he shows us how people can enter into the Kingdom of God. First Jesus warns us about the danger of being locked outside of this kingdom and then he reveals the eternal joy of the Kingdom of God.

### **Part 1: Jesus warns against being locked outside**

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has just recently started to give the disciples glimpses of Judgment Day and the life to come. He often uses the picture of a wedding banquet. Earlier in chapter 12 he used this picture to show that we should always be ready for Judgment Day. Later on he again uses the picture to show that many will be invited to join the Lord in heaven but many of those people will refuse the invitation. Then the Lord will invite many “lowly” people to take their place in heaven.

An important reason that we should be ready for this day is given in 12:40 which says, “the Son of Man will come again at an hour when you do not expect him.” Because Judgment Day is coming at any time, we always have to be prepared. We see in today’s text more reasons to be prepared for that Day. By again using the picture of a banquet, Jesus tells us a little bit about who will get into that banquet and who will be locked outside for all eternity.

Speaking about when the entrance to heaven will be locked, Jesus says, “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’” (13:25). When that final judgment comes, no one who is an unbeliever is going to be let into heaven. Once that door is locked, there are no more second chances. Those unbelievers will beg and plead to be let in. However, Jesus will say, “I do not know you or where you come from” (13:25). Think about how terrible that will be. God will tell them that he does not know them. God will be separating himself from them for all eternity.

As their last effort to get into heaven they will say, “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets” (13:26). Unbelievers will claim to have known God. They may even think that they actually knew him. They may have been a member at a church that claimed to be Christian but in reality it taught works righteousness rather than the pure Gospel message. Perhaps they sat in a true Church their entire life but the Gospel never truly touched their hearts.

On that day, the judgment will hit them full force. Jesus will say, “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me you evildoers!” Then they will go to the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (13:27-28). Jesus will cast out those people who did not believe in him. They never had a real relationship with God. They are evildoers in his eyes and Christ wants nothing to do with them. They will go to eternal destruction in hell. They will be separated from God and his blessings for all eternity. They will suffer.

This harsh image of hell is different than how our society pictures hell. Some people think that hell is the place where only the really terrible people go. There is the idea that the devil is ruling there somewhat like a prison warden. Sure it is terrible to be there but many people feel that there is no danger that they will go there. Or perhaps they think that even if they do go to hell, they may just get used to it after a while. Maybe the suffering might be bad at first but then it will be like a daily routine. There is even the idea that if they go to hell, perhaps their friends will be there too. So at least they will be able to spend time with people they know.

These people have no idea how far off from the truth they are. Eternal damnation in hell is to be feared. It is such a terrible thing that it is beyond our understanding. To be completely cut off from the love of God for all eternity is a terrible thing to think about. People who go to hell will be cut off from every good thing. No love, no kindness, no blessings of family or friends, no pets or anything else from this world that would bring them happiness.

Hell is the absolute threatening of the Law. It is the place where unrepentant sinners inevitably go. Sometimes that idea can creep into our heads that hell is not a real danger. Maybe everyone will go to heaven because we are all “good” people. This is not the case, we are all sinful and hell is what sins deserve. Sometimes we may feel safe because we don’t live like those really terrible sinners. We don’t cheat on our taxes, we don’t steal, we definitely don’t murder. We have heard about Jesus and we listen to what he tells us to do.

Look at what Jesus said in our sermon text. He said that people who do not get into heaven will claim to know him. They will say that they ate and drank with him. They will say that he taught in their streets. Let us be careful that we are not like these people who claimed to know God. Let us be careful that we are not just going

through the motions of being a Christian. We need to watch out so that we do not become apathetic or complacent toward God and his Word. Sometimes we just go through the motions of worship on Sunday. Sure we speak the liturgy and sing the hymns but do you really think about the words that you are speaking during the Lord's Prayer or are you thinking about what's for lunch after the service. We also have a poor attitude toward the Word of God at times. Rather than taking 10 minutes out of our day to be strengthened by the Word, we find other uses for our time. We can also become complacent towards Mission Work. We sometimes think that someone else will take care of telling others about Jesus, we don't have to be the one out there proclaiming Christ.

Be careful when these temptations come your way. God wants us to live like Christians in every aspect of our life. We do not want to hear one day that Jesus never knew us. We need to be sure that we are going to heaven. We need to be sure that God will not lock us out of heaven.

## **Part 2: Jesus reveals the joy of the Kingdom**

How can we be sure that we are going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? How do we know that God is going to hold that door open for us? It is definitely not because of anything in us. It is not because we come to church every week or because we read our Bible. It is not because we are "good" people. We are sure because of Jesus. He is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He perfectly obeyed God's law for those times that we have failed. He was never apathetic toward the study of God's Word. He worshiped God whenever he could, he took time out of his busy schedule to be alone and pray to his heavenly Father. He was so devoted to the Word of God that Mary and Joseph had to go and find him at the temple. He was never complacent about Mission Work. Every time he met someone he instructed them with the Gospel. He never stepped back from his mission to save sinners.

He tells us in our sermon text that we should "make every effort to enter through the narrow door" (13:24). This means that we enter through Jesus. He is the only way to heaven. It is described as a narrow door because he is the only way. There are not many ways as some people think. There are not many right religions. Jesus tells us plainly that the only way to heaven is through him. Through the Savior who gave himself for us.

We will join believers from all over the world to be a part of this feast in heaven (13:29). Jesus holds those joys of heaven out to his believers. Because he has worked faith in our hearts, he holds open the door to heaven for us. We can be sure of our place in heaven because Jesus has given us the invitation to get in. He gave us our faith in him as our Savior through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. We are certain of our eternal life because we have the faith which trusts in Jesus as our Redeemer.

Jesus also says, "Those who are last will be first, and first who will be last" (13:30). Believers who are considered lowly in this life will be exalted in the coming world. Christians are not usually people of honor in the eyes of the world. Some people even think that we are foolish for following the Bible. Our reward is in heaven. There we will be blessed with all the glory of our God. We will be in the presence of pure love for all eternity. We will be exalted in heaven.

Look at the example of the rich man and poor Lazarus. Here we see that a very lowly person is exalted in heaven and a person who was exalted on earth received the ultimate punishment in hell. When the rich man wanted Lazarus to bring him some water to cool his tongue, Abraham said, "Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony" (Luke 16:25). Believers receive good things in heaven even if they do not always receive good things on earth. We will be comforted for all eternity. We will be comforted with forgiveness. We will be comforted because there will be no more of the pain that comes from this life. Just like Lazarus was taken to heavenly glory, we also will go to that glory.

The message that we can be sure of our eternal life is comforting not only for the life to come but also for this life. Because we know what awaits us, we can deal with the problems of this life. Sickesses and diseases do not seem that terrible because they may just be the way that God is calling us to our eternal rest. Our heavenly home also helps us deal with people who attack our faith. People may ridicule us for believing what we do, but we are on a path to an eternal joy that is far better than the alternative. It is sad that unbelievers are blind to the fact that they are going to a place of agony and torment. We are sure of our salvation not because of anything in us, but rather because Jesus paid for our sins and rose from the grave. He ascended to heaven and will take us to be with him one day. We are thankful that he sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we believe this all with a firm faith.

## **Conclusion**

It would be nice if God had told us more in the Bible about what Heaven is going to be like. We are often curious about our eternal life. He has told us the only important thing. We will spend eternity with our Savior. We will be comforted and blessed beyond measure. Heaven will be the place where the living God dwells with his believers. There we will sing praises together with the angels in a joyful assembly. There, being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, we will live joyfully in the comfort of the love of our God. That is all that we need to know. This eternal joy is the source of our comfort. Our joy will be that we get to be with Jesus for all eternity.