

July 22
Lesson 8 (NIV)

ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 1

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:15-23; Luke 13:22-30

LUKE 13:22-30

²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching 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 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ 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.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or 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 reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

²⁸ “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”



Photo: simonmayer / iStock / Thinkstock

KEY VERSE

Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.—[Luke 13:24](#)

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State attitudes and actions to be practiced and avoided.
2. Explain the position reversal of the first and the last.
3. Create a written plan to resist a cultural hindrance to inclusion in the kingdom of God.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. “Getting In” Trouble
- B. Lesson Background

I. Concern over the Kingdom ([LUKE 13:22-24](#))

- A. Question ([vv. 22, 23a](#))
- B. Exhortation ([vv. 23b, 24](#))

Twisty Straits

II. Citizens of the Kingdom (LUKE 13:25-30)

A. Those on the Outside (vv. 25-28)

Outsiders

B. Those on the Inside (v. 29)

C. Concluding Principle (v. 30)

Conclusion

A. Thinking in Reverse

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. “Getting In” Trouble

An old joke tells of the man who, while touring through New York City, asked someone, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” The response: “Practice, practice, practice.”

Admittance into an exclusive organization or institution is not easy. One usually has to have a certain amount of money, friends, and/or special abilities for that to happen. Take, for example, the baseball Hall of Fame. Nomination to be counted part of such an elite group must be earned. A player has to have the statistics to prove that he is worthy of belonging.

Entrance into God’s kingdom (the subject of today’s study) is quite a different matter! There is no way we can earn admission. Our “statistics” are dismal; [Romans 3:23](#) states that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We can never measure up on our own.

To make it, we need help. In baseball terms, we needed a pinch hitter—someone to go to bat for us. That person is Jesus. He is “the way and the truth and the life” ([John 14:6](#)). But he has a caution for us in today’s lesson, a caution we must heed.

B. Lesson Background

[Luke 13:22](#) (the opening verse of today’s lesson text) marks the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in the territory east of the Jordan River known as Perea. The Lesson Background of last week’s lesson offers information on Perea, so that material need not be repeated here.

I. Concern over the Kingdom

(LUKE 13:22-24)

A. Question (vv. 22, 23a)

²². Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.

The towns and villages mentioned here are those in Perea as Jesus proceeds southward through this region. The trip narrative *to Jerusalem* and, ultimately, crucifixion begins in [Luke 9:51](#). Many teaching opportunities are recorded along this journey of 10-plus chapters. As best as can be determined, Jesus has not visited Perea before now. As early as [Luke 4:43](#), Jesus had stated, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” That urgency still compels him.

Steadfastness characterizes Jesus’ urgency in accomplishing his mission. The centerpiece of that mission will be his sacrificial death for all humanity.

^{23a}. Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

Luke’s Gospel includes different occasions when it appears that individuals within Jesus’ audience raise questions or make comments spontaneously. That is much as a student might do in a classroom setting today.

Sometimes the questioner desires clarification of something Jesus has said ([12:41](#)). At other times the question or statement becomes the springboard for further teaching from Jesus ([10:25](#); [11:27, 28](#); [12:13-21](#)). On still other occasions, individuals desire Jesus to comment on a current event ([13:1](#)), while others take offense at something Jesus says ([11:45](#)).

We are not given any information as to the motive for the question *Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?* Perhaps it is asked simply out of curiosity.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of “few” who will find the “narrow” road leading to life while many will follow the “broad” road to destruction ([Matthew 7:13, 14](#)). But he has also spoken of the great growth of God’s kingdom, as in the parable of the mustard seed recorded just a few verses before our text ([Luke 13:18, 19](#)). So perhaps this individual is seeking some clarification from Jesus. How can it be “few” if the kingdom is to grow so spectacularly?

B. Exhortation (vv. 23b, 24)

^{23b}. He said to them,

One person has asked the question; the answer is directed to *them*, implying that a group or crowd is present. The answer is crucial enough that Jesus wants more than just the questioner to hear it.

²⁴. “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”

We notice that Jesus does not answer the question with a direct yes or no as it has been posed to him—nor is he obligated to do so. But the question is valuable in that it offers opportunity to establish a more important teaching point. The first order of business is not to inquire about how many or few will be saved; rather, the first order of business is to make certain that *we* are among those striving to be saved.

It is easy to raise questions and generate discussions over a host of religious matters. It is another thing to take such matters out of the realm of abstract ideas, make them personal, and consider their bearing on one’s personal relationship with God. The result should be to know what one must do ([Acts 2:37](#); [16:30](#); [Titus 3:14](#); etc.).

The phrase *make every effort* translates a Greek word from which we get our word *agonize*. It was used in reference to Greece’s athletic games in describing the kind of determined effort that is necessary to achieve victory (compare [1 Corinthians 9:24, 25](#), which uses the same word). Jesus is saying that a similar degree of

commitment is needed to enter the kingdom. This Greek word also occurs in [1 Timothy 6:12](#) as both a verb and a noun, being translated “fight the good fight.”

What Do You Think?

Considering that we are not saved by works, what should striving to enter the kingdom of Heaven look like?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In terms of actions of setting time and financial priorities, etc.

In terms of reactions to un-Christian influences that pull one away from the kingdom

A *narrow door* is one difficult to enter, requiring persistent effort. Jesus also refers to a “narrow gate” in the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 7:13, 14](#)). There the emphasis seems to be on finding that gate; here the emphasis shifts to the difficulty of actually entering through the door. Thus it is at this point that the question in [Luke 13:23a](#) is answered. But why will many *not be able* to enter? Jesus proceeds to elaborate.



Sheet 5—Summer 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

Photo © Thinkstock

Visual for Lesson 8. Point to this visual as you ask, “What deceptive labels does Satan put on these doors to tempt us to choose unwisely?”

TWISTY STRAITS

Slot canyons abound in the southwestern United States. Zion National Park in southwestern Utah has two well-known examples. One very difficult hike in that park—for technically proficient canyoneers only—is called The Subway. Traversing this narrow, winding canyon involves wading or swimming in water that is cold and deep, climbing over waterfalls, and scrambling over huge boulders.

Zion's larger canyon (and the one visited by the greatest number of people) is called The Narrows. The gorge has walls 1,000 feet high in places, and the Virgin River, which forms the canyon, is occasionally only 20 to 30 feet across. The hike up this canyon is most accessible to the average park visitor in the summer, when the water is at its shallowest depth and warmest temperature. That's when hundreds—sometimes thousands—of people a day hike through the water for a mile or more, drawn on from bend to bend, to see what lies around the next twist in the canyon's depths.

These canyons make for an interesting comparison with entry into the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus implies that the narrowness of the passageway to the kingdom acts as a deterrent to a majority of people who might otherwise enter it. On the other hand, it seems the difficulty involved in making one's way through narrow slot canyons is a challenge. What do you suppose draws people to the earthly Zion National Park and not to the heavenly Zion?

—C. R. B.

II. Citizens of the Kingdom

(LUKE 13:25-30)

A. Those on the Outside (vv. 25-28)

25. “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.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’”

The word picture of a *house with the door* having been *closed* signals the end of the day. The scene depicted is similar to that of the parable of the 10 virgins ([Matthew 25:10-12](#)). In both cases, those who are still outside the house when the door is closed plead to be let in.

But the pleas in both cases are to no avail. The response *I don’t know you or where you come from* is quite alarming and similar to [Matthew 7:23](#) (“I never knew you”) and [25:12](#) (“Truly I tell you, I don’t know you”). In all cases, Jesus is describing what will happen to the disobedient on the Day of Judgment. The declaration *I don’t know . . . where you come from by the owner of the house* indicates that those on the other side of the door clearly do not belong in the kingdom of God.

26. “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’”

Those on the outside are stunned, perhaps a bit incensed, at the owner's words. How can the master of the house claim not to know them, given all they've done in his *presence*? This verse describes how public Jesus' ministry has been and how much he has interacted with people by sharing meals with them.

27. “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’”

The owner repeats his denial and, echoing [Psalm 6:8](#), adds the yet more ominous *away from me, all you evildoers!* While there will be many who claim to know Jesus, the knowledge he is talking about is far more than just a familiarity with him. Those on the outside knocking at the door are people who lack a sound understanding of who Jesus is and the nature of the kingdom he came to establish. They may have dined in Jesus' presence—perhaps they were even the beneficiaries of his miracles such as the feedings of thousands—but their overall commitment to matters of his kingdom is no more than superficial.

The condemnation *away from me, all you evildoers!* is quite similar to Jesus' words “away from me, you evildoers” in the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 7:21-23](#). There Jesus was describing those who on “that day” (apparently the Day of Judgment) will try to be admitted to the kingdom of Heaven by pointing to the prophecies, exorcisms, and various miracles they did in Jesus' name.

Here in [Luke 13](#), however, Jesus says nothing specific about what those to be excluded will claim as credentials; he merely calls them *evildoers*. We can discern what this means within Luke's context by looking back a few verses to [Luke 12:45-47](#). There we find characteristics and behaviors of a condemned servant (who should know better) alongside his penalty.

In short, the one condemned is the one who does not do the will of God. Thus the message Jesus taught and preached during his Galilean ministry at the Sermon on the Mount is entirely consistent with the message now being taught and preached during his Perea ministry.

What Do You Think?

What has to happen for us to know that we are not fooling ourselves with regard to being a genuine follower of Christ?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the talk we talk (specifics)

Regarding the walk we walk (specifics)

Regarding connecting points between our talk and our walk (specifics)

OUTSIDERS

We've all heard stories about lifelong residents of New England, those supposedly taciturn folks who don't take well to outsiders who move into their communities. It's been said that individuals can live in the Northeast for 30 or 40 years but still not be trusted, because they “aren't from around here.” Distrust of outsiders is not limited to New Englanders, however. We all have ways of describing outsiders—people not of our own “tribe,” whether that definition is ethnic, regional, socioeconomic, or any other category by which we differentiate ourselves from others.

Greeks of biblical times called the rest of the world “barbarians” (compare [Colossians 3:11](#)). This apparently is from the sound “bar-bar,” which is what foreign languages supposedly sounded like to Greeks. “Country bumpkin” and “city slicker” are derogatory terms by which urban and rural people, respectively, sometimes refer to folks who live in the opposite environment. Of course, we are sadly aware of the various racial and ethnic slurs that poison society. Our view of those who differ from us is often not a positive one.

When Christ's kingdom comes in its fullest extent, some people will truly be outsiders . . . forever! It won't be because they “aren't from around here,” but

because they have not done the will of the heavenly Father.

—C. R. B.

28. “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

Comparing this verse with [Matthew 8:11, 12](#), we again see absolute consistency between Jesus’ teaching in his Galilean and Perea ministries. In both addresses, exclusion results in *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. Such language is associated with the outer darkness that characterizes the punishment of those who have no place in *the kingdom of God* ([Matthew 22:13; 25:30](#)).

Seeing *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom* will add to the misery of those excluded. Their position may be likened to that of the rich man who could see the beggar Lazarus with Abraham on the other side of the “great chasm” that separated the places to which they were consigned ([Luke 16:19-31](#); see [lesson 4](#)).

Many of the Jews in Jesus’ day, especially the religious leaders, assume that their natural ties to Abraham give them automatic entry into the kingdom of God ([Luke 3:8; John 8:33](#)). That they can be denied entrance to the kingdom and not be in the company of their renowned ancestors is unthinkable.

The standard of judgment, however, is one’s personal relationship to the Lord and faithful obedience to him. Physical or ancestral ties mean nothing; the obedient ones make up the Lord’s true family.

What Do You Think?

How do you answer objections to Jesus’ statement regarding what awaits the wicked?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Answering the “surely a God of love would not” argument
- Answering the “punishment doesn’t fit the crime” argument
- Answering the “it’s all speculation” argument

B. Those on the Inside (v. 29)

29. “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

The language of coming from all points of the compass echoes [Psalm 107:3](#). Inhabitants of *the kingdom of God* will come from everywhere! This signals the inclusion of people with no ancestral ties to Abraham (compare [Matthew 8:5-12](#)). This scene may be likened to that described in [Revelation 7:9](#) of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,” gathered before the throne of God in Heaven.

It is worth noting that the covenant God established with Abraham included a plan to bring all nations to him, not to limit his blessings to certain individuals. That covenant concludes with the words “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” ([Genesis 12:3](#)). In [Galatians 3:8](#) Paul notes that with those words God “announced the gospel” to Abraham.

The church now has the responsibility of continuing the fulfillment of that promise by taking the gospel to “all nations” as Jesus commissioned ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)). To be a spiritual descendant of Abraham, not a physical descendant, is what counts ([Galatians 3:29](#)).

What Do You Think?

What, if anything, does this verse say about your church’s current focus on cross-cultural evangelism?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In global terms
- In local terms

C. Concluding Principle (v. 30)

30. “Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

Jesus makes this paradoxical statement elsewhere. We see it twice in the parable of the workers in the vineyard ([Matthew 19:30; 20:16](#)) as well as in his encounter with the rich young ruler ([Mark 10:31](#)).

These contexts highlight a crucial principle: those who consider themselves *first* or in a privileged position regarding the kingdom of God are in great danger of finding themselves *last*. They need to make serious changes in their thinking, and they must begin to view people through Jesus’ eyes. Those whom the haughty Jewish leaders view as *last*, including tax collectors, prostitutes, and Gentiles, will find themselves at places of honor in the kingdom because they have chosen to enter on the King’s terms (compare [Matthew 21:31](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to avoid the error of seeing ourselves as spiritually superior?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When others speak well of us ([Luke 6:26](#))
- When our spiritual pedigree is lengthy ([Philippians 3:5](#))
- When experiencing a spiritual high ([Matthew 17:1-5](#))
- Other

At this juncture we would do well to return to the question of [Luke 13:23](#), at the beginning of our lesson text: “Are only a few people going to be saved?” In one sense, the answer is yes; compared with the multitudes of people who have lived over the course of history, few will enter the kingdom of Heaven. In another sense, the answer is no; for many from around the world, representing a variety of nations, people groups, and languages, will be included in Jesus’ kingdom.

It cannot be stressed enough that the more important issue is that each of us should “make every effort to enter” the kingdom ([Luke 13:24](#)) as we maintain a life of faithful obedience to the Lord. Doing so means ordering our lives around the King’s priorities and viewing people as he sees them.

Conclusion

A. Thinking in Reverse

“Nice guys finish last” is an oft-used expression. But after considering Jesus’ teaching in today’s text, the saying could be reversed (and also modified) to read “Last people finish nice [first].” This illustrates Jesus’ promise of a reversal of the way that the world often views people and situations.

The first/last reversal further illustrates the extent to which Jesus’ kingdom is, as he told Pilate, “not of this world” ([John 18:36](#)). Those considered movers-and-shakers or headliners in the world’s estimation do not carry such weight in the eyes of God. He is looking for those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty, the poor in spirit ([Matthew 5:3](#)), those who know they can never earn a place in the kingdom of God and do not have a sense of entitlement.

Consider what happened to the prodigal son in Jesus’ classic parable. This young man arrogantly took his father’s wealth and wasted it, then found himself in such desperate straits that he was relegated to feeding pigs. When he “came to his senses” ([Luke 15:17](#)), he determined that he would return to his father and prepared what was a very humbling speech.

HOW TO SAY IT

barbarians bar-*bare-ee-unz*.

Galilean Gal-uh-*lee-un*.

Perea Peh-*ree-uh*.

To the son’s amazement, the father welcomed him with open arms and spared no expense in showing mercy. Here is the irony: when the son thought he was of no further value to his father (or *last* in his father’s eyes), that is when he was truly ready to go home. And his father gave him *first*-class treatment, much to the chagrin of his older brother (who represents the haughty teachers of the law and Pharisees and their disdainful attitude toward the “last” in society).

Jesus’ words also have application to the work of the local congregation. Sometimes those who are more visible or vocal or up front receive the greatest attention or adulation from others. And those serving in more isolated areas (especially in more remote foreign fields) may never be appreciated here on earth for the degree of sacrifice they make for the kingdom.

However, such individuals will never be overlooked by the heavenly Father. He sees what is done “in secret” (as Jesus taught, [Matthew 6:4](#)), and those who have served in seemingly minor roles will receive an abundant reward from the Father. Nobody, whether good or evil, goes under the radar with him.

Churches and individual Christians should evaluate their ministries to the “last” in their communities. How such ministries manifest themselves can vary depending on the location, need, resources, etc. But each of us probably has some of the “last” in our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces—people who are used to being overlooked, scorned, or ridiculed. What can we do to be salt and light to those individuals, to treat them as “first” for a change?

B. Prayer

Father, help us not to lose our sense of needing to put forth our best effort in serving you. May we encourage one another to remain faithful servants. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We must abide by the King’s terms
to enter the kingdom.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Announce to the class that they will be playing a game called Captain Obvious. Every time you ask one of the following questions, the answer must be preceded by the words, “Well, Captain Obvious . . .”

Begin by holding up a genuine \$20 bill and a \$20 bill from a board game. Ask: 1-What do these two pieces of paper have in common? 2-What is the biggest difference between these two pieces of paper? 3-What would happen if you attempted to purchase something using the play money?

As a transition, say, “Today’s lesson deals with counterfeits in which people place their hope for Heaven; but Jesus has something quite different in mind.”

Into the Word

Read the following paragraph out loud:

During Jesus’ ministry, many people in Jerusalem were counting on their biological connection with Abraham as a type of guarantee that they would be included in the kingdom of God. Many of them were convinced that as long as the temple was still standing, God would never abandon any descendant of Abraham, either in this age or the age to come. Some of the people who followed Jesus and listened to Him teach thought that this would be enough to merit eternal life. Jesus challenged these assumptions, emphasizing that what mattered was the condition of one’s heart, not ancestral lineage or perceived level of “goodness.”

Divide the class into two groups, the *Expectations Group* and the *Reality Group*. Ask the *Expectations Group* to look at today’s text and identify all the

unchallenged, unspoken, or unsubstantiated expectations (based on ancestry) that Jesus describes of his opponents. Ask the *Reality Group* to identify how Jesus defined reality in terms of who will enter into the kingdom of God and who will not. Encourage students to describe how, when, and where they see this tendency at work today in supporting false expectations regarding who will be in Heaven and who won't.

Into Life

Draw learners' attention back to [Luke 13:29](#). Ask, "What does this verse imply about surprise guests at the great feast?" (See the commentary for possible responses.) Stress that no one will be excluded on the basis of family or national origin.

Shifting perspective on [Luke 13:29](#), say, "This verse speaks of arrivals *from* the four compass directions, but those arrivals can depend on what is happening *in* those four compass directions." Jot on the board the names of locations where Christianity is being suppressed and/or Christians are being oppressed (based on your research in advance, which you pass along during class). *Option*. Distribute copies of the map from the reproducible page, which you can download, to enhance this discussion. Encourage students to take notes on the map and use it later to prompt prayers for steadfast faith of their fellow believers the world over.

Bring the discussion back home as you say, "Praying for others is necessary and proper. But we don't want to neglect our own spiritual health in the process." Form students into small groups and challenge them to (1) identify local cultural forces that tempt Christians to take their eyes off the kingdom of God and (2) create a written plan to resist those hindrances.

After groups complete their work, reconvene for whole-class discussion. Set the tone for the discussion by quoting [Psalm 73:2, 3](#): "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

Option. Distribute copies of the "First and Last" word-search puzzle on the reproducible page. After students complete it, lead a discussion regarding relevance, or lack thereof, to entering the kingdom of God.