

## **CHALLENGES FROM THE LORD OF LIFE**

**Luke 13:6–35**

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Rather than reading this portion of God's Word in its entirety at the beginning, we'll take portion by portion as we go along through our study this evening.

I've called this message tonight "Challenges from the Lord of Life." The reason why I selected the word "challenge" is Jesus, continually in this passage, is in a position of dialogue and opposition with the religious leadership. Each of the Gospel writers' concern is to let us know how it was Jesus finished up on the cross in Jerusalem. What was it that set the plot or the stage.

As we have gone back to chapter 11:14, we have begun to see how Luke had begun to trace where the opposition began. Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute and the religious leadership said He was doing it by the power of the devil. Then, as you move through chapters 11 and 12, Jesus—a number of times—has real controversial engagements with the religious leadership. Things really keep moving along with intensity as we come through Luke 13:6–35.

I want to share with you, as we get into this, that Luke 13 is not the kind of Scripture that you would hear a sermon from, probably. It's not an exotic part of God's Word per se. It is not a prophetic part of God's Word. I've barely ever heard many sermons in my life from Luke 13. If a preacher was going to a church to candidate, it's very doubtful that he would say, "My sermon in this message is the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke." But one of the great things about going through the Bible sequentially, as we do, as we travel from book-to-book, is you get to every part of it.

I thought of Luke 13 in reference to an experience I had this week of driving back and forth from Imperial to Costa Mesa, which is about a three and a half hour drive. On that mountain route

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between San Diego and El Central, there are a number of picturesque, little valleys nestled away in the mountains with very few people living in them. I just wish I hadn't been in a hurry, because I wanted to get off the road and go probe around in those little valley areas and towns and spend a day or two enjoying this beautiful quiet, scenic area. But life was in the fast lane and I had to go and postpone that till a later time.

I thought, "That's a little bit like Luke 13 is, one of the delightful valleys, if you will, of God's Word." Tonight we have the privilege to spend some time in a part of God's Word where normally we do not find ourselves because we're traveling sequentially through the Gospel. This whole section that we are in—and it goes back to 9:50—is an account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. He is on the outskirts, the borders of Galilee, and He is in Perea and Samaria and a number of the adjoining districts. As we read through our passage, we come to five different challenges Jesus places before us.

#### **I. The first challenge is found in verses 6–9. Are you productive?**

Jesus told this parable, "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down'" (Luke 13:6–10, NIV).

We immediately realize, in reading this parable, that it has an historical application to the life and ministry of the Lord Himself. Before we take its devotional application for our lives, we simply understand it how Jesus meant it when He first gave the teaching. The man who is the owner of the vineyard is God. The vineyard is the world. The fig tree is Israel, which was meant to bless

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the world with its fruit. The caretaker is Jesus. The three years is His earthly ministry. And the one more year is His last appeal. That journeying to Jerusalem is where He will lay down His life.

The dialogue, as Jesus frames it, is that it's time to cut down the fig tree and that Israel, in terms of its special mission of bringing God's Word to the world, is at a period of the end of its usefulness. Because it is nonproductive, the Father is saying, "Cut it down!" Jesus says, "Give it yet one more chance. I will dig around it and fertilize it and see if it will yet bear fruit."

There are some lessons that flow off of this appeal and challenge about productiveness that not only apply to Jesus' day but to your life and my life. The lessons are these:

**A.** Privilege brings responsibility. The tree was in a favored position. Israel, historically, was in a favored position because God had called it into existence to have a land and a Book and a Messiah. Out of that land the Book and the Messiah would be produced, which would bring salvation to the world. Privilege, therefore, did not mean that Israel could simply look around at other nations and say, "God loves us more than you." But it was meant to be the vantage point of which the whole world could be blessed. "I will bless you and cause you to be a blessing to many nations," God said to Abraham.

This is true, not only of Israel, but it is true of every privilege we have in life. I think one of the greatest privileges that any person can have in life is the privilege of being a parent. Parenthood, as you know, is not only a privilege, but a tremendous responsibility. May I say to the children that being a child is also a great privilege, and also a great responsibility. It's a wonderful privilege to be a Christian, but there are also responsibilities to being a Christian. We forfeit the meaning of the privilege if we do not stay with the responsibility. It's wonderful to assume the responsibilities of being a member of a church, but with that privilege comes duty. Some may

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want only a position and to have a title and a banner that is passed to them which describes their function in life or their status. But Jesus says that He wants us to desire things that have responsibility to go with them. We ought to know that any time we're given special privilege, whether it's wealth or success or talent or whatever, that privilege brings responsibility.

**B.** Jesus is saying that uselessness invites disaster. The fig tree is going to be chopped down. This is not necessarily a teaching of Scripture that is applicable to salvation. It's not so much dealing with whether or not we can be saved and can be lost. Other Scriptures deal effectively with that. What this is saying is that, when someone ceases to be useful to God, their ability to be an instrument of His is over. Therefore, when we become prideful of our position or prideful of our spirituality and we begin to turn things into ourselves, then that invites uselessness to the Lord.

**C.** Then Jesus also says that something that only takes out and does not put back cannot survive. The problem with the fig tree was that it was taking up ground. It was extracting the nutrients from the soil but it was putting nothing back. Therefore, it could not last.

When I am in the Holy Land, on the Lake of Galilee, I inevitably share this little reading that Bruce Martin wrote about usefulness. He compares it with the topography of the land of Palestine. He says, "There are two seas in Palestine. One is fresh and fish are in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to sip of its healing waters. Along the shores, the children play as children played when He was there. He loved them. He could look across its silver surface when He spoke His parables. And on a rolling plain, not far away, He fed five thousand people. The River Jordan makes this sea with sparkling water from the hills. Men build their houses near to it and birds build their nests and every kind of life is happier because it is there.

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“The River Jordan flows on south to another sea. Here, in that sea, there is no splash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds, no children’s laughter. Travelers choose another route unless on urgent business. The air hangs heavy above its water, and neither man nor beast nor fowl will drink. What makes this mighty difference of these neighbor seas? Not the River Jordan. It empties the same good water into both. Not the soil in which they lie. Not the country round about. This is the difference: the Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the Jordan. For every drop that flows into it, another drops flows out. The other sea is shrewder, hoarding its income jealously. It will not be tempted into any generous impulse. Every drop it gets it keeps. The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. This other sea gives nothing. It is named the Dead Sea. There are two seas in Palestine. There are two kinds of people in the world.”

Nothing that only takes in can survive.

**D.** Then the other thing that Jesus is telling us about the fig tree is that God is extremely patient with it. That suggests that He’s not only patient with Israel but He’s patient with us. There comes a moment when His patience is at an end. And there is a final chance. So Jesus, as this Scripture progresses today, is moving toward that final opportunity, and Israel will have to embrace Him. Just as there will be, in our life a final opportunity to be productive if we are not now.

So what we should do in our life, internally, is not look at the Scripture and simply say, “Jesus is addressing Israel.” He’s also addressing us. He’s asking us, “Is there fruit in your life which is benefitting and blessing My name and My kingdom and the people and the family that you’re with?”

**II. The second challenge that the Lord throws out is a challenge for us and raises the question, “Do you have a wholesome picture of God?”**

In verses 10–17, He is challenging His generation with their unwholesome picture of God.

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“On a Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years [This is only one of two miracles of illness associated with the possession of a spirit or the oppression of a spirit]. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, ‘There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.’ The Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’ When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing” (Luke 13:10-17, NIV).

Religious people do not always have wholesome views of God. Here is a classical instance in which people have got ritual ahead of meeting another individual’s needs. You can picture the synagogue situation, if you will, because in the synagogues in those days the men would sit in the front, in the center section. If there were women in the synagogue audience, they would either be up in the balcony or they would be on the very back of the synagogue area. So for Jesus to have this bent-over woman come where He could lay hands on her means He had to disturb the whole synagogue service and bring a woman up to the front of the synagogue where she would not normally be found. This would have, of course, created an aura of suspense in the synagogue as she shuffled down the aisle and came forward. Jesus heals her.

The ruler of the synagogue—in those days as in these days, typically a lay person who has been voted into that responsibility by the congregation—would have, no doubt, been indignant. He is

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a strict Pharisee, and according to Pharisaic rules, you could not help a person get better on the Sabbath. The Pharisees' had strict rules, for example, if you were sick. Let's say your eye was smarting. You could put enough salve on the eye to keep it from hurting more, but you could not put enough on it to help it get better. The idea was that you keep everything as it is, lest anyone labor on the Sabbath. You could, however, provide for your animals. Jesus, in healing her, flaunts the tradition, and the synagogue ruler is smart enough not to take Jesus on. He doesn't turn around and indignantly rebuke Jesus for doing the healing. What he does is chew the people out for having the audacity to walk into the synagogue on a Sabbath day sick and tempting Jesus to heal them. "There are six days," he says, "in which you can be healed. Please don't come to the synagogue sick on the Sabbath day. You know this Jesus who goes around healing people and breaking the Sabbath."

Jesus did not take too kindly to this theology. He said to them very point blank, "You hypocrites!" And He went on to demonstrate why He was calling them hypocrites. He challenges their theology of the Sabbath.

In Jerusalem, just few days ago in a hotel—and you'll find this in any Jewish hotel in Jerusalem—there was a "Sabbath elevator." In the normal elevators, you get in and you punch the buttons. If you want the seventh floor, you punch seven, and up the elevator skims to the seventh floor. But if you're an observant Jew and it's the Sabbath day, you have to begin to interpret the Torah as to what is work on the Sabbath, and modern mechanical conveniences really make this interpretation of the Torah difficult. So what do you do if you suddenly have a device that takes you from the bottom floor to the seventh floor? You just push a button and it takes you. Does that constitute work or does it not? You get around that by having the "Sabbath elevator," which stops continually on every floor. You get into it and the door closes and it

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automatically advances one floor at time. This elevator is a little slower, but it gets there without your having to violate the principle of work.

You say, “Isn’t that funny? Isn’t that a legalistic tradition?”

I don’t really make fun of it, because I grew up in churches where people preached against short skirts and had long tongues. It’s not that I’m advocating short skirts by any stretch of the imagination. But I’ve seen a lot of weird things in my lifetime, too, including unwholesome views of God. Jesus does not want us to live our life dominated by unwholesome views of God. I used to be sure, for example, that the Lord was waiting for an opportunity to send me to hell. It’s taken all the grace and the love of God to convince me that the Lord came so I could go to heaven. God isn’t waiting for an excuse to send me to hell. I was once in a tent meeting as a kid. I’ll never forget the moment when the evangelist said, “I’m going to cast a demon out of this person and anyone here who doesn’t have faith in your heart—this demon’s going to enter you.” Unwholesome view of God? You better believe it! I was petrified. It probably did a marvelous thing of sanctifying me right on the spot. It was terribly scary. It was the kind of thing Jesus never did. The most He was ever willing to negotiate with demons was to send them into pigs, not into other people.

There was a lady that came to me this week at a camp meeting where I was speaking. She said, “How do I respond to my husband, to my family? They’re telling me that my recent surgery, in which a 6 inch tumor was removed, was the result of a judgment from God on my life, something I had done wrong, some sin I had committed. I’ve searched my heart and I can’t find anything I’ve done wrong or why I deserve this. How shall I answer them?”

I took her to last Sunday night’s text, Luke 13:1–6, which said, “Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?” Were the



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workers on the Pool of Siloam tower any worse because they were killed and others weren't?

Jesus said that a lot of things happen to us that don't have anything to do with whether we're good or bad, sin is in our life, faith in our life, whatever. I think one of the most damaging, unwholesome views of people today is this view knocking around that if something's wrong with you, it's because you've committed some sin in your life.

So Jesus wants to keep us fresh and updated; He wants us to understand that we have a loving heavenly Father who cares about us and isn't looking for an opportunity to make us a whipping boy or girl.

Do I have any unwholesome views of God? Any childhood images I need to grow out of? Could I call God "Father" and maybe divorce that from whatever inadequate model of an earthly father I may have in my mind? Can I really see God as the Father whom Jesus talks about in the prodigal son, who is anxious for me to be in His loving care?

**III. The third challenge Jesus places before us in this text is the challenge of whether or not we understand the kingdom of God.**

Do you understand the kingdom of God? Jesus asks, "What is the kingdom of God? What shall I compare it to?" The people of His day were thinking that the kingdom of God was: David's Son is going to come and rule and be a political Messiah and everything's going to be wonderful and Jerusalem is going to be the capital of the earth. Everybody's going to pay their taxes to us and we're going to get bigger houses and have the best life and all that sort of thing. What shall I compare it to? Should I compare it to Caesar's palace? Should I compare it to standing armies? Shall I compare it to the tenth Roman legion? What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It's like a mustard seed. How disappointing! The mustard seed is like a speck, a little black piece of dirt.

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When I graduated from college, my professor, who had a great part in molding my life, met with the senior class on the last retreat. The very last thing that happened on that retreat was he that he took out a little packet of mustard seeds and he gave each of us one. He laid it in the palm of our hand. It was just there—a little speck in the palm of our hand. Then he said, “Now go out and be this in the world. Let something happen with the seed that was given to you in this college. Go do something with your life.” Powerful illustration. A mustard seed is nothing.

“The man took and planted it in his garden. It became a tree and the birds of the air perched in its branches.” What does that mean?

Again he said, “Again he asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough’” (Luke 13:20–21, NIV). He was using household illustrations about the kingdom of God. Why is Jesus using them? Obviously He’s speaking in parables. Parables are designed to be stories thrown alongside a truth, and they either reveal or conceal a truth. There is some truth Jesus wanted to conceal. He wanted the Pharisees to go away scratching their heads saying, “What was He talking about? The kingdom of God like a mustard seed or the kingdom of God like leaven hidden in dough?”

Yet to those who understand what Jesus means by the kingdom of God, He’s talking about two things. He’s talking about the extensive growth of the kingdom of God and He’s talking about the intensive growth of the kingdom of God. He says, “Do you understand this? What I’m doing seems so small from a human point of view. My work on earth is like a grain of mustard seed. It is so small and insignificant.” Jesus covered such a limited amount of geographical territory. He ministered to very few people in terms of the total global population of the world for umpteen centuries. How many people did He actually minister to? How many people did He actually have

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close to Him? Very, very few. It was a tiny, tiny seed that He planted. But He says that when it's planted, it's going to grow up and become a great shrub, a tree and the birds are going to come and nest in it.

There are some people who have an interpretation of Scripture that says there should be a Law of First Mention that controls your hermeneutics, your interpretation of Scripture. So the a Law of First Mention in this case would apply to the instance in which Jesus talks about the birds. In His first parable of the kingdom He talks about a seed that's sown along the path and the birds come and eat it and the birds are the devil coming to grab up the Word; so, therefore, if Jesus said the birds equal the devil in the parable of the sower and the seed, therefore, any other time He uses the word "birds," it means devil and you've got what He means—the kingdom of God is the seed, it grows up and becomes the institutional church and the devil comes and roosts in the branches. And anybody who knows the institutional church knows that's true. But that's not the most likely meaning of the parable because there is no law to support the Law of First Mention. It's just somebody's idea.

What Jesus is, no doubt, drawing upon here is references that go all the way back to Ezekiel and to Daniel, who speak of a tree providing nesting and shade, space for birds, which would be representative of the nations of the world. For example, in Ezekiel 17:23, it says, "On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches." What the prophet is saying is that Israel is going to be used by God and all the nations will come and take shelter in what it provides. Then in Daniel 4:10–12, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar which Daniel ultimately interprets, "I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top

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touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed” (Daniel 4:10–12, NIV). What Jesus is saying is that here is this kingdom which has begun in Galilee and Jerusalem and Judea—this very little place is going to grow up and become something very significant and very large, and it’s going to fill the earth. People are going to come from every country and find shelter in the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom, which starts out small but is going to have vast intensity.

I like to point out, at this juncture, that Jesus here is qualified in every sense to be a prophet. Because what He said about his kingdom came to pass. The kingdom which started out with a group of people, all looking like Jews, and every time I’m in Israel and see those beautiful Hasidic Jews with their unique black costumes and the curls for their sideburns and the particular gait which they have, I recognize that in Jesus’ day, while they did not necessarily wear the black, there was the peculiar look to the observant Jew. Jesus is saying, to that very closed-in ethnic community, “My kingdom is going to be more than a closed-in ethnic group. It’s going to embrace you, but not only you. It will embrace all kinds of people, reaching all the way to the Gentiles of Southern California.” He didn’t say Southern California, but He did say “all nations.” What Jesus is telling the disciples is that the kingdom of God should keep us away from the attitude of provincialism. It should keep us away from the attitude of writing anyone off as though God can’t reach them. So the kingdom is extensive.

He also says the kingdom is intensive. It’s leaven or yeast. Here again, people look at leaven or yeast and say that whenever leaven or yeast is used, it’s the symbol of evil. Therefore, it’s the corrupting influence invading the kingdom of God. Here again, we’re stuck with the actual

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words of Jesus. He's making a comment that the kingdom of God is like leaven. When He speaks of the kingdom of God, He's not saying "the institutional church." He's talking about the real article, the real thing. The kingdom of God, if you want the technical but inaccurate definition the kingdom of God, is the reign of God or the rule of God. In this world, in the present, it is not present. It's invisible. It's in the human heart. Therefore, the kingdom of God Jesus says, is like leaven. Not something evil, but it is an invasive force. It changes the quality of that which it invades.

So not only is the kingdom of God extensive—it's going to keep us away from narrow views and sectarianism and provincialism and "God only saves people in our denomination." It will keep us away from all that, that kind of view. But it's intensive. The kingdom of God comes and one of the marks of the fact that the kingdom of God truly has come is that it changes our lives. That's why I protest so much when we only use the word "salvation" like "I got saved." Because there's more to salvation than getting saved. There's also the matter of getting converted. If you're saved and you're still the same kind of person in terms of your indulging in the world's ideas and values and lifestyle, then there's a question of whether or not the kingdom of God has truly come, because the kingdom of God is going to change whatever dough it's put into—your dough and my dough. Leaven changes. It's a sign of transformation here. It's not a sign of evil in this particular passage. In other passages it can be a sign of evil. But here it's a sign of transformation.

Jesus says, "You're going to get a good dose of the kingdom of God." I don't cook so these figures don't mean as much to me as to some of the chefs in the audience. But I would suspect that a half a bushel or 22 liters of yeast is a good hunk of yeast. You need a lot of dough to put

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that in. What Jesus is saying is, “I’m going to give you a good batch of the kingdom of God, I’m going to put it in your life and it’s going to change you.”

I was thinking of a daring experiment when I was campus pastor. Here in Southern California, about 85 percent of the students live about an hour’s drive from home. So they’re away from campus on the weekends. But at Evangel College, about 90 percent of the students don’t go home on the weekends. The weekend becomes the center of social activity and it becomes the center of church activity. So churches in Springfield fill up when the school year is in because the students go to their church. Then, when the summer’s on, you can tell that school’s not in. I sort of got tired of watching the students fill all the churches year after year. They sit there, take a hymnal, but they’re not doing anything. Even if every church in Springfield had plenty of positions for the students, you still would only use a thimbleful of the student manpower that would be available. Besides, when vacation time comes, they’re going to be somewhere else. I kept watching that week after week, year after year. The students were just sitting in the service. So we developed this crazy idea of a God-squad. We hand-picked a group of young people who were really wonderful Christians in their life and could handle this assignment with not only skill but with a great high sense of ethics. What we were doing skirted on thin ice. We selected a church in town that was known for being a “dead church.” By “dead” I mean the pastor was not sure the resurrection happened. I’m not talking about dead in the sense that people didn’t say “Amen” or wear choir robes or anything like that. I knew a member of that church rather well. I led a member of that church to know the Lord and into the baptism of the Spirit, so I knew a little bit about that church. I knew, also, that the pastor was open to dialogue. He kind of prided himself in being a person of dialogue. So I asked these six or seven students to meet with me. We began to pray. I said, “What I’d like to do is send you into this church. Begin attending. Be

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there as leaven. Don't do anything that you're not asked to do. Be upfront as to where you're from—you're from Evangel College. Make sure you're not overstepping any boundaries and that, if you get in any place of responsibility, that you've gone through the right leadership of the church and people understand why you're there and what you're doing. Go and see if you can be leaven. Instead of just attending a church on Sunday morning and just sitting there, go for it."

They went and, for the first few weeks, they just went to the services. They went to the youth group. There was just a handful of kids in the youth group. After a while, the leader began to take an interest in them. One week, one of the students in the group was asked to give a little message and everybody thought it was wonderful and sincere. They were asked to do more. It was about within six months that the pastor of the church had invited the leader of the group we sent in to hold a revival at the church. They were having scores and scores of young people turn out for the meetings and a lot of kids got saved. These kids did it all through the structure.

I love the Assemblies of God and I'll always be in the Assemblies of God, but I sometimes wonder, if I were starting over, if I wouldn't select maybe the Methodist church. Because they need a revival! There are all these buildings that are just sitting there and there are twenty people left there. It would be so much fun to see that church come back to John Wesley.

As Christians, sometimes we say to people, "We've got to be very careful, because somebody could contaminate us." So we teach our kids to be afraid of the world. There are forces out there that can contaminate people, but Jesus says the action works the other way around. "If you're really vitally in Me, you're not going to get contaminated by them, you're going to yeast them. You're going to invade them and things are going to change." It's not the bad apple that's going to spoil the barrel, it's the good apple in the barrel that's going to make all the bad apples good, to reverse the analogy. We're not meant to live our life in the kingdom of God as though we

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were somehow weak patsies or somehow going to be driven around by the world. Jesus says,

“The kingdom of God is going to come with power. It’s going to come intensively.”

There are reasons why I stay with this denomination. I love accountability. I love right doctrine. I love fellowship. I love a congregation being protected so that if any deadbeat thing happens to the pastor, the church isn’t left without a rudder or without a course. Why should you invest all your funds in the work of the Lord only to have it all go up in smoke because of irresponsible leadership? Not that I’m thinking of being irresponsible—but there’s protection that we have in the denomination.

The kingdom of God starts as a small seed, it’s a small beginning, it works unseen, it works from the inside. But the power, the power to change the dough, which comes from the outside, is the investment that God has made in our lives, and changes the world we’re in. Intensive. Intensive within our families, intensive within the church, intensive within the world, intensive within our PTA, intensive within political parties. Wouldn’t it be great to work for the right social causes of the day from within the context? People don’t expect you, if you’re a Democrat, to be anything other than liberal on social ethics and to be pro-abortion, pro-gay rights etc, etc. Maybe that party needs to be retaken by the evangelicals.

But the kingdom of God is leaven. We need to be out there, working for the Lord. Why withdraw from PTA? Why withdraw from associations where we can make an investment? We need, in this city, for example, more Christians in the city council and the school boards and the community college school board—all through the ranks. If you decide to get involved, I don’t care so much where your politics are, as long as you are a committed Christian. I believe you’ll get in place. We may disagree on political issues, but if you are of the right character, God will bless you and help you be an influence in the city for Him.



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### **IV. The fourth challenge, verses 22–30. Are you on the inside of the kingdom of God?**

“Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?’ [It seems to be that conclusion because only a few people are following Him.] He said to them, ‘Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 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.” Then you will say, “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.” But he will reply, “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!” 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. [So if you’ve ever wondered if Abraham, Isaac were even saved, we have it in the Word of the Lord, that they’re in the kingdom of God. So they’re covered by God’s grace in spite of all their sins. There’s encouragement for us. If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can make it in the kingdom of God I suppose we can too. But here are souls thrown out. ] People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” (Luke 13:22–30, NIV).

Jesus is challenging the people of His day as well as us. “Make every effort,” He says, “to enter through the narrow door.” The word “make every effort” is really one word that says, “agonize.” It’s the word used of an Olympic athlete who is in training, going through a regimen. Jesus is not teaching that salvation is a matter of our own human works. I think we take the Lord’s words in context of what Paul says, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12–13, NIV). So

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God's at work and we also have a corresponding obligation. Jesus is saying to the people of His day, it isn't being genetically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that's going to be counting in the last days. The rabbis of Jesus' day said, basically, that in the future kingdom of God, all of Israel would be incorporated into the kingdom of God just because they belong to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, although a few bad Israelis would be left out. Jesus said, "No, I don't agree with that at all." We must understand Jesus as challenging His contemporaries as well as challenging us. He challenged that view, He took it on and said, "No, it's not right."

A couple of years ago, I was in Jerusalem. Jewel and I had the privilege of being hosted for dinner one evening by a wonderful Arab Greek Orthodox Christian. He has probably the leading store in Bethlehem and has been a great help to the Assemblies of God work and the Baptist work among the Arab people. He and his wife are not simply Arabs from Bethlehem. They are jet-setters. They come to Orange County and stay for a month at a time. They've lived in Paris. They make the world their home. They're very affluent and have very good business. We're talking with them. His wife says, "I meet those of you who are Christians and talk about being born again. Exactly what does that mean?" I thought, what an invitation! All of a sudden, her husband said, "I can tell you what that means. You and I grew up in the Greek Orthodox Church. But that doesn't make us a Christian. Just because we grew up in the church doesn't make us a Christian. Being born again means you have to make the choice on your own. It isn't your family, it isn't where you grew up. It's making that decision yourself to invite Jesus Christ into your life. And I've done that in my life." He said that to his wife, which was kind of news to her. I thought I couldn't hear a better description of what it means to be born again from anybody. It's your own choice, not where you grew up.

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That's exactly what Jesus is saying here, "Don't expect that you're going to depend on where you came from." That's not so much a revolutionary idea to us anymore. But it was a revolutionary idea in Jesus' day. Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God has nothing to do with your racial or family stock. He's saying, "If you're not a child of faith, and have made the decision to let the kingdom in you, then you're going to be on the outside while internationally the kingdom comes from the east, west, north, and south. It's taken by people who are not genetically the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

#### **V. The fifth challenge Jesus lays out is that He challenges us, through His own example, to love people to a conclusion.**

Not walk off from our obligation, but to love until our task of loving is completed with our own death. We must love to the death—verses 31–35. "At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to Him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill You.'" We look at that and say, "Wait a minute! We thought all Pharisees were opposed to Jesus. Here are some Pharisees that came to Him that apparently wanted to help Him out. They're saying, 'Herod's looking for You. Get out of here.'" But it's probably not what meets the eye. Jesus turns around and says, "Go tell that fox..." He knows these Pharisees have come with a message from Herod. He's wanting to send them back to Herod. Herod says, "Jesus is giving me trouble. I think He's John the Baptist sometimes. I wish He'd go south to Jerusalem where Pontius Pilate could take care of Him. Tell him to go get out of here before I get Him." Jesus says, "Go back and tell that old fox." Herod is the only person that I read of in the Gospel that Jesus borders on showing contempt for. He calls him a fox. Later, when Jesus appears before him, when Herod is in Jerusalem at Jesus' trial, Jesus won't even say a word to him. The reason why Jesus won't even talk to him is that Jesus figures he didn't act on the message of John the Baptist, so until he

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makes up his mind, He's not going to give him one more word of revelation. It's the principle I talked about this morning—to him who has, more will be given. And Pilate hadn't acted on what he had, therefore, he wasn't given anymore. "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

[An ironic statement.] O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Luke 13:32–35, NIV).

We know Jesus will say this particular phrase in the last week of His life again when He sits on the Mount of Olives and looks over the expanse of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. But here, He says it in advance of getting there. He is saying to Herod, "Look, your warnings aren't going to intimidate Me at all. I'm going to keep doing what I've been doing. I'll drive demons out and heal people today and tomorrow, and the third day, I'll reach my goal." Probably here a reference, not to His resurrection on the third day, but simply one, two, three days, meaning "I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing and in a short time or an indefinite time, then My work will be completed." Yesterday, today, tomorrow.

By the way, you're going to find a little warning of what's coming. As we approach the year 2000, if Jesus tarries, we're going to hear a lot of marvelous prophetic interpretations about the next millennium. Same thing is going to happen in the year 2000 that happened in the year 1000. When the clock began to turn that meter on 1000 years, everyone got very prophetic and apocalyptic of what would happen. It's already started. I heard a sermon recently that took this

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text—today, tomorrow, the third day I will reach my goal—and linked it with Hosea 6:1–2:

“Come now. Let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces and He will heal us. He has injured us. He will bind up our wounds. After two days He will revive us and on the third day He will restore us.” He linked those two verses with “a thousand years are in the LORD’s sight as a day.” Therefore, Israel has not been a nation for two days and on the third day it will be restored. Therefore, we can look for the year 2000 to begin to usher in the millennium. That would be wonderful. I’m all for that, if that will happen. It’s very questionable exegesis of this particular verse, where Jesus is not appearing to relate it at all to the mission of Israel as a people but to His own mission, that is soon going to be completed. For no prophet can die outside of Jerusalem. This little lament that Jesus gives outside of Jerusalem raises the question in our life as to what extent we will go in seeking the restoration of another person. Jesus is saying, by His moving to Jerusalem, “I will go to any limit to manifest and to prove My love for another.” What Jesus does, in His own life, is tell us to love a person to the limit, even to death. He’s telling that about our own relationships and our love for people. How far are you willing to go to show another person that you love them? Will you simply walk off before you have completed the demonstration of your love for them? That is mixed up in your own death to self. So it’s a little prophecy here that Jesus gives us to talk about our willingness to love to the limits.

In closing, Jesus says, “I will not see you again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” He repeats this when He’s in Jerusalem, after the triumphal entry, as a reference to His second coming.

One of the great things about being a Christian is that we know where history is headed. We know that Jesus is coming back to Jerusalem. There will come a day when He returns, in which the whole city will say “Blessed.” I got to thinking about that this week when I read this. If Jesus

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came back to Jerusalem today, there are people there that are not going to be too happy that He came back. When He comes back to the Temple Mount; the Muslims who dominate the Temple Mount are going to be very upset. Also the nonobservant Jews who don't believe there is a God, which 85 percent of Israelis are non-observant and really do not believe in a personal God, they're going to be surprised when the Lord returns. The observant Jews are going to be surprised and they're going to be praising Him in the great synagogue.

Jesus is going to come back to the Mount of Olives and say, "You have it all wrong." And the Christians in Jerusalem are going to be surprised too. That is, the ones who've spilled blood for the holy places. Can you imagine a real Christian spilling blood to get a hold of a building because it was a holy place? Or have you been in some of those places of superstition, laden with idolatry, or in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where one group of Christians disagrees with another group of Christians over who has the right to claim a wall? "A lot of people will be surprised when Jesus comes back to Jerusalem, as they will be all over the earth," Jesus says. Those who look for Him are going to be delighted. Those who don't are going to be surprised and chagrined. We have it on the authority of Jesus: He's coming back.

So as Jesus engages in this dialogue, He does so from an upper hand. He knows who God is. He knows who He is. He knows what the future is. He invites us to be a part of what He's doing. Here are the challenges. Are you productive in your life for God? How do you stay productive? Jesus says in John 15, "If you abide in Me and I abide in you, you'll bear much fruit." The person who is not bearing much fruit or not bearing any fruit will be chopped down. The one who is bearing fruit, He's going to prune. So just because you've been cut on recently doesn't mean you're not bearing fruit. It just means that, for a while, you may be chopped so you can be more fruitful. The Lord wants to make you fruitful. How does that fruitfulness exist? Stay in

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Christ. Grow in Christ. Live in Christ. And do you have a wholesome view of God? Do you understand the kingdom of God, that it is a growing thing? We can't ever gauge how God is at work by simply looking at externals. Many times, God is at work powerfully and it cannot be seen. It's as small as a grain of mustard seed. There may be a person listening here who God will greatly use in His kingdom. It's not evident now, but the kingdom is working. Do I understand that the kingdom of God works this way and I must allow room for growth of the kingdom of God in me? Have I entered into the kingdom of God with agony? Is effort associated with my service to Christ, or am I simply coasting along as a believer? Am I willing to love others to a conclusion rather than to love only a little or love only for a short time emotionally and walk off before the responsibility is finished, even if it involves the death to self? Challenges from the Lord of life. I trust you've enjoyed this little valley of God's Word tonight.

### **Closing Prayer**

How grateful we are, Lord, to be in Your kingdom and to acknowledge You as the Lord of our life. We pray, Lord, that Your Word will dwell in us richly and that we'll heed it's message and love You the more and be helped by You everyday, to live triumphantly in this world. Bless each one of us this evening, we pray. Let Your Spirit come upon us now as we pray together and as You help us to fulfill the responsibility You want for us, to encourage one another and build up one another and pray for one another. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.