

1. How does one know for sure one is a Christian? How do we know if others are Christians? That is in effect the question of this lesson. There's a term used 31 times in this gospel, "the kingdom of God". That by the way is my lesson title. That kingdom refers to any and all people living today as well as back then who trust in Jesus as being both in charge of their lives and believe He's God. What I want to teach in this lesson is to understand who is and who isn't a believer in Jesus. It is to show how we can be sure we can be saved and what we should do about it. This chapter also teaches us that this kingdom is not a physical location, but only describing those of us who trust in Jesus to guide our lives as well as save us for all of eternity. My point is Christians don't look any different from anyone else. It is strictly based on how we act that we can tell for sure that we are saved. With that said, let me give some chapter details to explain this proof of salvation:
  - a) The first story is about two tragedies that occurred at the time of Jesus. In both cases, a bunch of people died relatively young due to unfortunate circumstances. Jesus point is that unless we're willing to be a part of His kingdom, however long we get to live here is irrelevant to the fact that those who belong to this kingdom get to live forever. The lesson is about our willingness to turn our lives over to Jesus so we can be part of His kingdom.
  - b) The next story is about taking care of a single fig tree that has not produced any fruit. In the Old Testament there are a couple of times where fig trees are used as a symbol for the nation of Israel, and that is what it represents here. What Jesus was teaching them about that fig tree, also applies to us: That is, we can't be pleasing to God based on being moral or doing good works. If we live that way we'll never know if we're good enough to please God based on our efforts. However, if we trust in God alone for paying the price for our sins and then live to please Him out of gratitude for what He's already done for us, then we are part of His kingdom.
  - c) Then Luke tells a story of Jesus healing a woman who had back problems and was bent over for eighteen years. The text implies that some sort of evil spirit caused this to occur. As one who's had back issues on and off most of my life, personally I don't care what did cause the problems, but I just want them to go away. In this story, Jesus touched her, and of course the pain instantly stopped. The real point of the story is that it occurred on the Jewish Sabbath in a synagogue. The religious leader "party line" at this point is that Jesus did have a gift for healing, but He should not use it on the Sabbath as they healing on that day is a violation of one of the 10 commandments. Jesus then tells the synagogue leader, "Do you still feed your animals on the Sabbath?" The point here is that yes the Sabbath is made for rest, but that rest doesn't mean we avoid all activity that we need to do. It just means we rest from whatever activity we normally do, so we can take some time in order to worship God on one day out of seven.
  - d) At this point, Jesus talks directly about the "kingdom". He uses illustrations to teach what the kingdom is and isn't. The first illustration is about a tiny seed that when planted grew into a large bush where birds rested. Considering that Christianity has grown from being an obscure offshoot of a relatively small religion (Judaism) to billions of people, I can safely say that the kingdom did grow like a tiny seed into something really large.
    - i) To explain the bird reference, I also need to add the second reference, which is the fact that Jesus described adding yeast to a large amount of flour. In both cases, the idea is describing something we think of as being really small and it grew so that it is larger than we normally think of it. Consider birds living in an 8-foot high bush. That is not normal. However, the idea of a kingdom of believers will grow beyond what anyone can comprehend, just like that bush. Even with the yeast, the idea is of bread rising to something bigger than what one can normally imagine.

- ii) Doesn't large growth also imply corruption? The history of the church like any organization will have some corruption. We have to remember the corruption does not come from the king Himself, just those who live in the kingdom. In the last lesson I made the point that Christians are sinners who marry other sinners and produce sinning children. The Christian church as a whole was never meant to be a perfect organization, just a large group of sinning people who trust in a sinless leader and rely upon the leader's power to make a difference for Him.
  - e) All of that leads to the question of, "How many people are saved?" If the church will be that corrupt, will there be a few or a lot of people in heaven? One has to understand the mindset of Jewish people at that time. They thought they were saved, not because they were perfect people, but because they trusted in their good deeds outweighing their bad deeds in order to be saved. I am convinced this is the greatest lie in human history, that we get to go to heaven because we're basically good people. Therefore, Jesus never does answer the question of how many people are saved, but takes on the underlying question of what does one have to do be saved. He answers that by saying effectively we should strive hard to enter that kingdom.
  - f) The question then becomes, if we are saved by just believing that Jesus is God and that He did die for our sins, what are we to strive for? That's where living the life of belonging to the kingdom comes into play. It is about constantly trusting that Jesus is in charge of our lives and looking to Him for guidance. As the classic joke goes, the hard part about being a living sacrifice for Jesus, is we're constantly crawling off the altar in order to go live our way versus the way God wants us to live. So if we're saved by faith alone, what is Jesus talking about when He says strive? Yes we're saved by faith alone, but there are rewards in heaven based on our willingness to trust Him to guide our lives. That's what living in the kingdom here on earth is all about.
  - g) The final parts of the chapter talk about Jesus desire to complete His goal of dying for our sins despite threats of those in both civil and religious power. Jesus talks about His desire for those who were called to salvation to trust in His complete sin payment. He says how it was His desire to gather His flock (Israelites) under His protection and guidance. Since they're not willing to trust in His sin payment, most of them are not saved.
2. All of this leads us back to us: The kingdom of God is not a physical location, but just a name to describe everyone who believes Jesus is in charge of our lives and God raised Him from the dead. The purpose of this chapter is to teach us who is and who is not a member of His kingdom. If we already believe we are members of this kingdom, then think of this chapter as a set of instructions we can use to instruct others on how we are to operate as part of that kingdom. With that overly long introduction completed, time for the verse by verse commentary on this chapter.
3. Chapter 13 Verse 1: Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."
- a) Let's start by remembering where we left off. Chapter 12 was basically a single speech by Jesus that continues in the first part of Chapter 13. I referred to this whole speech by Jesus as describing what it means to be a Christian. Remember my title for Chapter 12 was "To be a Christian costs us nothing and everything at the same time". My point is that same speech is continuing here as we get into Chapter 13. As most of you know, the chapter breaks were not added until roughly a thousand years after the Gospel was first written. My point is in Chapter 13, Jesus is still talking, but He is now focusing on describing who is and isn't eternally saved by being part of "God's kingdom". So now that I've finished that little speech, let me talk about the first five verses themselves:

- b) Jesus is talking here about two historical events that occurred in Jerusalem not long before the speech He's given now. Let's start with the story of Pontius Pilate: Nonbiblical records indicate Pilate wasn't kind to the Jewish people. He was a Roman Government appointee to oversee Jerusalem. The short version is that he was so bad, that the Roman Emperor eventually replaced him after Jesus crucifixion. As to the specific event being described here, most commentators believe Pilate had some of his soldiers dressed as average Jewish people at the temple where sacrifices were offered. When the talk arose against Pilate, the soldiers then killed some the locals. That's how the blood of some local Jewish people got mixed with the blood of the animals being sacrificed. There is more to the story, but the short version is that Pilate was corrupt, and it harshly affected the lives of Jewish people living in Jerusalem at that time.
    - i) The second story is about a tower that fell. One of the reasons that Pilate wasn't liked is that he took money from the Jewish temple to build an aqueduct. Part of that aqueduct was a tower that was built. Apparently the tower fell, and that act killed a bunch of people.
  - c) Jesus point here is not to condemn Pilate or even to condemn those who were killed in the two stories told here. The point is people die at one time or another. In effect, all of us are living on "borrowed time". That's Jesus point. To use a modern example, those who died on "9-11" some years back are no better or worse than those of us living today. Those who belong to the kingdom of God are those who trust that Jesus did die for our sins and He is in charge of our lives. Those who don't trust in those facts aren't part of that kingdom. In that sense it doesn't matter when each of us die. Jesus point here is that eternal life is not based on how long one lives on earth, it is based on what we did with the time we have. Yes we're saved by faith, but proof of our faith is based on how we live our lives.
  - d) This type of discussion always leads to the question of what about babies who die? The related question is what about those who never heard of Jesus? My short answer is that is God's problem to sort out. Since I believe God is fair, He judges such things accordingly. To those of you who've lost say, babies at childbirth, consider that those children are most likely saved for eternity and we don't have to worry about them. What we do have to do is use our "borrowed time" to make a difference for Jesus as that is what we are called to do as citizens of that kingdom. That's why Verse 5 ends with the idea of repent or perish as that is what Jesus meant by that idea. To repent is to turn from one's sins and use our time to make a difference for God. Now that I've pounded that over all our heads, we can move on to the next set of verses.
4. Verse 6: Then he 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. <sup>7</sup> 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?'
- a) To understand this parable, consider that the Old Testament has a number of references of a fig tree as symbolic of the nation of Israel. (For example, see 1 Kings 4:25, Hosea 2:12 or Micah 4:4). Fig trees were commonly grown in ancient Israel so the Israelites can relate to this parable easily. Notice that the landowner is only describing one tree, which is a clue that Jesus is describing something bigger than a fee tree. The underlying idea of course is about Jesus being rejected by the Israelites. The point is during the three years that Jesus has been proclaiming that people need to repent and trust in Him as their long-promised Messiah, the vast majority of Israelites refused to turn to Him that way.
  - b) Let me explain this concept another way: Most of the Jewish people thought that they're saved because they were good people. The same way most people today believe they're going to heaven because their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds. We can and should do good deeds out of love for what Jesus has done for us, but not as proof of how good we are as people.

- c) The bottom line is just as that specific fig tree hasn't produced any figs after three years, so Jesus is trying to get the point across to whoever's willing to listen to Him that all of us are living on "borrowed time". Even today we use that expression to describe someone who's survived through a terrible calamity or say a stroke. Jesus point is that He is not going to travel forever from town to town preaching His message of repentance. Just as the Jewish nation will be destroyed roughly forty years from this time, so Jesus wanted that nation to get the idea collectively and individually that if they didn't trust in Him as the promised Messiah not only would they individually go to hell but their nation would also suffer for failing to see Jesus as the Messiah.
  - d) So if the Jewish nation suffered for failing to see that Jesus is the Messiah, why are they a nation again today? Some Christians called "amillennialists" have the view that the new nation of Israel is just a coincidence and is not part of God's plan of redemption for that group of people. Of course I don't hold that view. God's unconditional promise made to King David is that a descendant of his would rule from Jerusalem forever. That's why the nation has to be in Israel's control in order for Jesus to rule from that nation. To state the obvious, many disagree with it, but it is the most common view held by evangelicals in describing the events around the 2nd Coming of Jesus.
  - e) In the meantime, it's time to get back to Jesus describing a single fig tree:
5. Verse 8: " `Sir,' the man replied, `leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "
- a) The conclusion of the fig tree story is effectively "OK, I'll give you a little more time but not a lot. If things don't change soon, I'll cut down that tree." Years ago, I asked a devout Jewish friend why religious Jews believe God allowed their temple to be destroyed when the Romans conquered that city. He said because we Jews failed to teach Torah to others. To state the obvious, they don't see their collective rejection of Jesus as being the reason so they concluded that because they didn't teach God's laws to non-Jews, they suffered. This argument falls apart for the simple reason we can't be perfect based on our actions. Think about it this way, if we only have to be good say 60% or 90% of the time, how would we know what is God's standard for acceptance into heaven? We can never know, which is why Christians hold the simple idea of being perfectly forgiven by God Himself paying the price for our sins as opposed to trying to work harder to prove our worth to Him.
  - b) Bottom line is most people today still want to prove their worth to God just as they did back then and that's why most people reject being part of God's kingdom based on the false idea of in effect our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds. Because the Israelites living back then (collectively) failed to see that, in a sense they were destroyed as a nation. In 66AD, the Romans started a campaign to completely destroy the Jewish nation, and by 70AD, the city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed. That was the "cut down fig tree".
  - c) On that "happy note" Luke changes topics. Verse 9 marks the end of Jesus' speech that He started back in Chapter 12. Luke now moves on to describe something Jesus once did as He was traveling from town to town working His way to Jerusalem for the "big event".
6. Verse 10: On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, <sup>11</sup> and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." <sup>13</sup> Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.
- a) Short version: Jesus does another miracle here with purpose of not only demonstrating His power as God, but to teach about His Kingdom as we will see in the next set of verses.
  - b) Longer version: A woman went to her local synagogue every week with a really bad back. Luke as a doctor somehow was told that the cause of the bad back was demonic. The text is not saying every bad back is demonic, but it is not to be ruled out as a possibility. How she had her back pain ended is the key point: Jesus touched her, and that was that.

- c) This miracle is not included at this point in the story as a random event. It may have been a common occurrence for miracles as Jesus traveled, but that's not why Luke included this little story in the middle of the text. The reason the story's here is it sets the scene for a big dialogue that takes place over the next few verses. Speaking of which, let me add them:
7. Verse 14: 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."<sup>15</sup> 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?"<sup>16</sup> 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?"
- a) The "party line" among the religious leaders at this point was that Jesus had the power to do miracles, but He was violating the 10th commandment of "no working on the Sabbath" by healing on that day. In other words, the rabbi's interpretation of violating the Sabbath became more important than Jesus actually doing a miracle at this point in the story.
- b) I have to admit, one of the toughest things to accept in an established religion is any sort of change or anyone not doing things their way. When I study a great moving of the Holy Spirit (that is, a large group of people coming to Jesus), it almost always occurs outside of the established churches as too many people can't handle the idea of God working in any way outside of their own set of nonbiblical-required rules. Realize that the largest church growth in the last few decades has been in conservative non-denominational churches. It is a perfect example of what Jesus is saying here, one can't be saved by working hard at it.
- c) Jesus is criticizing the Jewish rabbi's in this synagogue because on the Sabbath they still go and feed their animals. Yet here was a woman in back pain for 18 years (see Verse 16) and Jesus effectively said, "Enough pain, who cares if it's a Sabbath, let's heal here and now". It isn't the same today, as I do know religious Jewish people have changed their views on this. They permit in modern Israel doctor's to work on the Sabbath, let alone soldiers and police. The point in the text is the synagogue ruler couldn't deny the miracle, but was far more concerned with "working on the day of rest" than he was with actually helping the woman in need. That's the issue being debated in these verses.
8. Verse 17: When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.
- a) The positive news of this little debate is that Jesus won the crowd over. However, we all know how fickle crowds can be. They appreciated Jesus point that to help someone is far more important than say resting on the Sabbath day. However, as we all know by now, the vast majority of people still refuse to accept the idea that they aren't good enough for God based on how they've lived their lives. In the meantime, let's enjoy this little victory before we get into the heart of this chapter, beginning in the next verse.
9. Verse 18: Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?"<sup>19</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."
- a) As I said in the introduction, the main point of this chapter is to understand what the term "kingdom of God" is all about. Here in Verse 18, Jesus of course, who already knows the answer wants to get that audience and us the reader to think about what that kingdom is and is not all about. To explain it, Jesus uses another farming example.
- b) Before I begin, let me give a quick technical note. Of all the seeds that were used to plant crops in the Middle East at that time, the mustard seed is the smallest. We do know that there are smaller seeds, such as tobacco seeds. Of all the plants and trees that were grown back then, the mustard seed is the smallest of those seeds. A mustard bush will grow to a size of about 8 feet in height and 15 feet around.
- c) With that said, it's hard for us to picture birds in a bush/tree of that size. Jesus point isn't about the literalness of this bush, but to use it as an illustration. Let me explain:

- d) One has to understand that the disciples didn't get the idea yet that a kingdom would be individuals who believe in Jesus. When one thinks of a kingdom, one pictures a section of real estate under control of one person. The disciples were probably still thinking Jesus is going to overthrow the Roman Government and set it up from Israel. That's why Jesus is giving us this illustration that His kingdom is like a tiny seed that will eventually grow to become a large plant. Today in the world, if I'm not mistaken, there are more people who call themselves Christians than any other religion in the world. I'm not saying all who say they are Christians are saved, I'm just pointing out the literalness of Jesus' statement.
  - e) So why did Jesus say birds make nests in that kingdom. If a mustard bush is about 8 feet in height, that's not something we associate with birds? Why not compare the growth of the religion to a tall tree? Why birds in a mustard bush? One possibility is to show that even though we don't associate birds with that bush, it shows the mightiness of what we don't think of as something special. It's like saying, you may not think of a bush as being that special, but this plant becomes so big, birds make their nests in it.
    - i) At this point, let me add the next verse and tie it together:
10. Verse 20: Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? <sup>21</sup> It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."
- a) The analogy given here is similar to the mustard bush, in that Jesus is making the point that Christianity will grow larger than what people expect. By mixing yeast into a large amount of flour makes bread rise. Jesus is predicting a great growth of Christianity even though there is no "land" associated with this kingdom.
  - b) Let me explain this idea another way: Let me assume you and I are saved. If we go into a restaurant where no one else is saved, do we look differently than anyone else? We don't have a special glow if we're saved. We may do things to act in a way that indicates we are saved, but if we just stand there, we look like anyone else. Jesus' point is "The kingdom of God" is not a physical location, but individuals around the world that trust in Jesus as I love to say, being in charge of their lives and believing He paid the price for our sins, once and for all. While you and I may realize this as obvious today, it was a radical concept to explain to an Israelite living under Roman rule.
  - c) Stop and consider that at that time, Israel was a small and insignificant part of the largest empire the world have ever known. Jesus was a leader of a bunch of "nobodies". Word of Jesus can only spread one mouth at time as there was no mass communication. Even with that, at the time of the cross, the number of believers was only a handful. Yet, Christianity grew into the largest religion in the world. The point is Jesus is predicting all of this in the last few verses about the international growth of Christianity like a tiny mustard seed will grow to be a large bush or leaven put into flour causes a large growth in bread.
  - d) But John, wasn't yeast a negative picture in that culture? Wasn't it forbidden use yeast at most of the Jewish holidays? Yes, as yeast (or leaven) is associated with sin, because sin grows from the inside if left unchecked. We all know the Christian church is far from perfect, and there's the possibility that Jesus is talking about the corruption as the church grows based on that yeast illustration. However, I believe that when in doubt, we should keep it simple. My point is in context of the surrounding verses, I don't think Jesus is discussing the possibility of corruption, just that Christianity will grow from something that is very small to something so large that it becomes a "kingdom".
  - e) One also has to understand why this topic was brought up here. Remember that people expected the Messiah to overthrow the Roman Government and set up the kingdom now. They didn't get the idea of it spreading worldwide one person at a time. If I had to pick the main reason Jesus is rejected, it was because He didn't meet the Jewish expectations of a ruling Messiah then and there. They didn't want a Messiah who would go die for their sins. They just wanted one who will rule now. Jesus needed to change their view of who the Messiah is and how His kingdom would grow all over the earth.

- f) Of course in 2,000 years of hindsight, this is easy to see today. The reason we still need to know this is so we can explain how Jesus prediction literally came true and how trusting in Him today still brings the same eternal salvation as it did back then.
  - g) Believe it or not, the idea of the "slow but eventual growth" of Christianity did sink in to someone in the crowd, based on the next question coming up.
11. Verse 22: Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"
- a) The reason Verse 22 is here is to point out that the discussion of the previous set of verses is not the same as the question asked in those verses. They are connected in that if Jesus is explaining that the kingdom of God (that is people around the world united in their belief that Jesus is God and did rise from the dead), the logical question is "who is saved, or how many people will be saved?"
  - b) One may want to remember that at this point in history, Jesus was traveling through the southern part of Israel eventually working His way to Jerusalem for the events that lead to the cross. Here at one of those occasions Jesus was effectively asked, how many people are going to be saved? A few or a lot? Notice Jesus doesn't answer that question. Instead He gets to the underlying question of what does one have to do in order to be saved. I'm sure the person who asked the question was concerned about his own salvation, which is why he asked it in the first place. With that said, let's read what was Jesus response to that question:
12. Verse 23 (cont.): He said to them, <sup>24</sup> "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.
- a) This speech by Jesus will continue until Verse 29. Since it discusses who is and who is not saved, it is important to discuss. First notice that Jesus says that the entrance is a narrow door. I'm not sure what that means, but given the fact that many want to get in there, but can't because the door is narrow, it's a big clue that it's harder than one thinks. We tend to think of getting saved as saying a quick prayer and that's it, you're in. Do I believe that salvation is by faith alone? Of course. But I also believe God's holiness shouldn't be taken lightly either. Let me explain that better:
    - i) Back in Chapter 9, Jesus said that anyone who wants to follow Him has to take up their cross daily. The idea is about dying to our own desires. To belong to Jesus is about literally letting go of every desire in order to do what God wants us to do.
    - ii) So what does God want from us? Avoiding what is sinful. Studying the bible for guidance for our lives. Using our lives to make a difference for Jesus. If you don't know what it is God has specifically called you to do, pray about it. Tell Jesus that your life is in His hands. What do you specifically want me to do now? God may or may not give us a specific answer. My view is to do what one is good at or one enjoys doing and find a way to do it for God's glory. The key is our willingness to let go of our desire in order to do His desire.
    - iii) That's why Jesus refers to salvation as "striving to enter the narrow door" to use my own translation of that version. Yes we are saved by faith alone. However if we claim to have that faith, then again we have to "die to ourselves daily" in order to be used by Him for His will. That's what living the Christian life is all about.
  - b) Unfortunately that means that many people who think they are saved, will not be saved. Who I fear for the most is those who think they said some "magic prayer" once, and now they don't have to worry about it anymore. Or worse, they think that because they have done good deeds in Jesus name, they are saved because of those good deeds. The leaders of Judaism thought highly of themselves because they did good works. They and many don't get the idea that we have to trust in Jesus alone for payment for our sins and at the same time, be willing to let go of any and all desires we have for our lives. It is the idea of constantly realizing God is in charge of our lives and not us.

13. Verse 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.' <sup>26</sup> "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' <sup>27</sup> "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'
- a) The most important thing to get out of these set of verses is the fact that some people will think they are saved, but they are not. Let me start with the literal point made in these verses and then I'll modernize it. Jesus has now spent about three years going from town to town throughout Israel. I'm sure there are now many people in Israel at that time who can claim they ate with Jesus or they listened to Him talk. However, that is not enough to claim salvation. Salvation meant trusting Him as both being in charge of our lives and of the fact God raised Him from the dead.
    - i) The point today is many people can say, I attended church sometimes, or at one point in my life I made a vow to accept Jesus as God. However, such a person can't claim they ever knew Jesus.
    - ii) If that's true how does one claim for sure that they know Jesus? Great question. It is based on how we lived our lives since we made that commitment. Do we trust Jesus to guide our lives or not? Are we living as the bible desires we live and are we making every effort to turn from sin? That's why Jesus said a few verses back in this chapter that we have to strive (the Greek word literally means to agonize) in order to be saved. Yes we are saved by faith alone, but our actions prove what is our faith. That's how one reconciles both.
  - b) Stop and consider Verse 27 where Jesus will say "I don't know you". If we believe that Jesus is God, than obviously He knows all things. In that sense, Jesus is not being literal. He is saying that we never developed a relationship with Him in the sense of us trusting Him to guide our lives as well as pay the complete price for our sins. That's what Jesus means by the sense of "I never knew you".
  - c) Meanwhile, if the last few verses didn't scare you enough, wait until the next three:
14. Verse 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. <sup>29</sup> People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."
- a) One of the strange things one has to grasp about heaven and hell is that when one is sent to hell, one is still aware of the existence of heaven and who is there. I have to admit I've always wondered how hell worked practically. Not that I want to go there, but just to try to understand how one can be in pain forever. After awhile, wouldn't one get used to the pain of hell and stop gnashing teeth? The way I view it is, if God can design a place for us to live He can also design a place of eternal torment.
  - b) If that isn't complicated enough, the bible teaches that some will suffer in hell more than others well. This was hinted at back in Luke 10:12. So how does one suffer more or less in hell? That tells me the level of discomfort can be "regulated" by God.
  - c) Meanwhile, the text implies that people from all over the world will be saved while there will be many Israelites who go to hell. For a Jewish person, that is a mind-boggling idea as they believe one is saved if one is an observant Jew. Jesus is teaching that the rituals as taught in the bible point to Him and if they don't accept His sin payment, then all of the work they do to prove their worth to God is a waste of time.
  - d) Let's suppose we sort of know all of this. Let me speak to the believing Christian for the moment. The question is now what? The "now what" is the reminder of how much we have to strive or agonize daily to let God guide our lives as opposed to wanting to do our own will at any given time. Trust me, that alone is enough to keep us busy all the time.



- e) OK enough about hell and judgment. Let me switch subjects and talk about heaven for a moment. If you stop and think about it, the bible doesn't tell us a lot about what heaven is like. We get a few clues here and there, but what do we do for eternity? Wouldn't it get really boring after awhile? I'm convinced the reason the bible doesn't talk much about it in the literal sense is that the bible is a guide for how God wants us to live here and now. I'm equally as convinced God has plans for us for all of eternity and we aren't privileged to know those plans as of this lifetime.
- i) All of that leads me back to these verses. The only people we know are saved are the Old Testament prophets as stated by Jesus in these verses. Do I think there are other people saved from the Old Testament? Of course. In fact, in Chapter 16, we will read of a beggar saved for all of eternity.
  - ii) What the text does teach about heaven is that people will come from all corners of the world to be a part of His kingdom. Obviously after two thousand years we see how literal this has come true. Considering that when the Christian church started it was at the most a few hundred people. It is amazing how it has spread all over the world, without any mass communication. Despite periods of persecution over the history of church, it has still flourished and grown. Despite some big efforts to kill the Christian church, it can't be killed simply because God said it would grow and flourish and history has proven the bible to be true in that aspect.
  - iii) Speaking of persecution, that leads me perfectly into the next verse:
15. Verse 31: At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."
- a) A little historical background would be helpful here. At the time of Jesus birth, the ruler over all of Israel was a man called Herod the Great. He was non-Jewish and appointed by the Romans to rule over Israel. He put in his will, that his territory be divided into four parts, with one of his sons ruling over each of those four parts. That did occur for a while until the Romans had to replace some of those sons for corruption. That's one reason why Pontius Pilate came on the scene due to one of Herod's sons being that bad.
  - i) Another of his sons was named Herod, and that's the Herod spoken of here. This is the Herod that had John the Baptist killed. He ruled from a city called Caesar Philippi, which Jesus is never recording as visiting. Since Herod had John killed, it would be natural for Herod to be concerned as John taught of Jesus as being the promised Messiah. In other words, this Herod may have feared a revenge killing.
  - b) All of that leads me back to these verses. By this time in history, the Pharisee's wanted to eliminate what Jesus was teaching. In effect they were looking for an excuse to get rid of Him. Therefore, they used Herod as an excuse to drive Jesus away. All of that leads us to Jesus' response in the next verse.
16. Verse 32: He replied, "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.'<sup>33</sup> In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!
- a) To begin to explain this, one has to understand that Jesus was well aware of His destiny to go die in Jerusalem and be raised up. He also understood that His role was to help people with their lives as proof of His deity. If you think about it, He could have done all sorts of things to prove who He was. He could have made himself a 1,000 foot tall or move large mountains around. Instead Jesus did miracles not only to prove who He was, but also to show us how much He cares for individuals and their lives.
  - b) To call someone a fox is to describe a small animal that can cause trouble. This Herod was the local governor over the area where Jesus was born and raised. Yet He didn't consider Herod significant enough to ever visit the city where he ruled from. Instead Jesus wants to give a message to Herod that Jesus has a mission to accomplish and there is nothing he nor anyone else can do to stop that mission.

- c) All of that leads to Verse 33. If one studies the history of the death's of the prophets in the Old Testament, most did die in Jerusalem that we know of, but not all. I don't think Jesus intent is to be that literal. His point is that Jerusalem is associated with being the capital of the nation of Israel. Therefore, Jesus as a prophet of God must die there as that is His destiny. To call Jesus a prophet is not to deny His deity. It is just to understand that over and above His deity, He is also a prophet in that He came to preach God's truth to those who claim to be God's people. Like most of the Old Testament prophets, His message of repentance and turning to God was rejected.
  - d) Let me stand back for a moment and talk about this from our perspective. Most of us who are Christians are all well aware of this history. Why should we care about all the details of how Jesus avoided Herod and focused on His mission? Part of the answer is so that we can be sure that Jesus is who He claims to be. When difficulties come and we have doubts about our faith in Jesus, passages like this remind us of the reality of Jesus and the fact He does care about people back then as well as today. It also reminds us that just as Jesus did focus on His mission, so God calls us to focus on whatever mission He calls for us to do.
    - i) One of my favorite signs is on a church I belonged to for years. It was placed on an outside wall as people were driving away. It read, "You are now entering your mission field". In other words, as members of God's kingdom, our home is not in that church building. Our home is in heaven. In the meantime, God calls each of us to enter our mission fields to make a difference for Him. That is the "Kingdom of God" in a nutshell. The fact that Christians exist everywhere with the purpose of using our lives to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) As I love to point out, one of the great joys of life is to do what one enjoys doing in order to make a difference for God. If one is not sure what one is called to do, then go pray about it and ask God to show us how He wants us to use our time to make a difference for Him. I promise that over time, God will guide us, if we're willing to turn our lives over to Him.
    - iii) In the meantime, it's time to finish the chapter.
17. Verse 34: "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!<sup>35</sup> 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.'
- a) The bad news of this chapter is that it ends with the reminder of the big price to be paid if we choose to reject Jesus as the one who rules over our lives. Here Jesus is stating the fact that throughout the Old Testament, those who were called to be prophets were killed and stoned to death as the Israelites have constantly rejected the idea of living as God desired them to live or trying to prove their worth to God based on one's efforts.
  - b) In effect, these two verses may be the saddest one's in the Gospel. They state the reality of the cost of rejecting Jesus collectively as well as individually. One of the proofs that Luke wrote this Gospel prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans, is the fact that this act by the Romans is never mentioned in this book or the bible at all. Yet Jesus as God who knows all things, knew in advance about the destruction of that nation and the fact that Israel won't have self rule again for about 2,000 years.
  - c) If you think about it, God did all He could to draw the Israelites together to serve Him. If one studies the history of the Old Testament, it is full of prophets sent by God with a goal of getting people to turn back to Him. The reason for the Babylonian captivity was due to their lack of willingness to turn to Him as an example. In effect, Jesus is claiming deity in these verses, as He says "I" have wanted to gather all of those who trust in Me together in one place as a mother hen would gather her chicks. One reason the Christian church was created is as a vehicle for God to collect all of us who do trust in Jesus for our salvation. We will gather together, but as I said, home is heaven, not here on earth.

- d) Now that I've given the bad news about the history of Israel to that point, the chapter will end with good news for the Israelites. In effect, Verse 34 is statement that will come a day when Israel collectively will call for Jesus to return.
    - i) Verse 34 has two classic interpretations. The first is that any individual Jewish man or woman who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be saved. The second is the idea of the nation of Israel collectively (not everyone, but as a whole) accepting Jesus as the Promised Messiah. Personally, I hold both views to be correct. All of history has shown a small percentage of Jewish people accepting Jesus. There will also come a future day of national acceptance of Him as their promised Messiah.
    - ii) As to when that occurs, no one knows the day or hour. However, Verse 34 is that clue that a day will come when Israel as a nation accepts Him as the Messiah.
    - iii) That's one reason why I'm convinced modern Israel exists today. For the last two millenniums Christians have debated whether or not Jesus would literally return and rule from Israel. You would think that now that the nation exists again, that debate would have ended, but it still goes on. To me, the fact that Israel is there is proof that God keeps His unconditional promises that the Promised Messiah will come to rule over the world from that land.
  - e) OK, time to take a deep breath. Most of us reading this lesson already believe that Jesus will return to rule one day. How does any of this affect us from non-Jewish backgrounds? The answer is the "kingdom". If we accept the idea that we are saved, then whether we think about it or not, we are part of His kingdom. No, I'm not talking about heaven. I'm talking about our lives here on earth. A kingdom is the most efficient form of government one can have. All it takes is a perfect king to rule over us to make it work well. The point is that as members of that kingdom, God wants us to use our time and our resources and what we enjoy doing anyway to make a difference for our king. That's what living out the Christian life is all about: Using our life to benefit the king. Does that mean we have to ignore every other aspect of our lives? Of course not. It's just is a reminder of just how valuable our time is and there is no greater use of it, than to make a difference for Him.
    - i) That's what Jesus is trying to teach us in this text and the point I'm pounding at in this lesson. With that said, let me close in prayer that we use the time God gave us in order to make a difference for Him.
18. Heavenly Father, we don't know what today or tomorrow will bring for our lives. We just know that we do belong to a kingdom where You are in charge of that kingdom. Therefore, we ask You guide our lives for Your glory. Give us the wisdom to understand what it is You desire that we do as citizens of Your kingdom. Finally, provide us with Your power and Your boldness so that we can use our time and our resources to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.