# GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

## Many people reject the Good News, *Luke 13:22-35*

Although Luke only wrote two of the New Testament's books (Luke and Acts), his pair occupies as much space as Paul's thirteen letters. A good reason motivates the volume of Luke's writing – he wrote to affirm Theophilus' conviction about the Good News concerning Jesus (*Luke 1:1-4*). That purpose means Luke's writings offer insight into the meaning and application of the gospel ("gospel" and "good news" translate the same Greek word *euangelion*).

Luke opens his gospel by recording a prophecy that the Holy Spirit motivated Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, to announce (*Luke 1:67-79*). His prophecy outlines the rescue God would accomplish through Jesus, the Good News of a new exodus. Consider:

> ***Luke 1:68-71***[1]
> Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
> for he has visited and redeemed his people
> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
> in the house of his servant David,
> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
> that we should be saved from our enemies
> and from the hand of all who hate us;

However, a question asked by an anonymous figure in Luke 13:23 raises concerns about the exultant announcement of the Good News. The question – "Will those who are saved be few?" (*Luke 13:23*) – draws attention to people's rejection of Jesus' good news. This lesson considers Luke's record of the question, which he presents as a focal point for **the widespread rejection of the Good News about Jesus.**

## "Will those who are saved be few"[2]

In Luke 9:51, Luke wrote that Jesus "set his face to go to Judea." But he did not journey merely to attend the upcoming Passover in Jerusalem; he traveled to the city to die, a purpose that revealed a problem and created misunderstanding (*Luke 9:21-22, 43-45; 18:31-34*).

Luke slows the pace of his gospel's narrative, dedicating ten chapters to tracing Jesus' movement towards Jerusalem (*Luke 9:51-19:40*). However, his record of Jesus' journey does not focus on Jesus' *movement* but instead gives its attention to his *teachings*.

[1] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.
[2] Luke 13:23.

- An ever-increasing crowd accompanied Jesus as he traveled to Jerusalem (*cf. Luke 11:29; 12:1; 14:25*). The population of the crowd swelled because of the activity of the disciples Jesus sent ahead of him (*Luke 10:1-12, 17-20*) and by the crowd's growing anticipation that he might be the Messiah.
- Despite the number of people who joined themselves to Jesus, Jesus' teachings reveal that he encountered widespread misunderstanding and rejection (*cf. Luke 9:51-55; 10:13-15; 11:14-23, 29-54*).
- The tension between the anticipation surrounding Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the rejection he met undoubtedly played a role in the question someone in the crowd asked him in Luke 13:23, **"Lord, will those who are saved be few?"**
- Rather than answering what seems like a yes/no question, Jesus directed his attention to the crowd accompanying him, warning them that "many" will try to enter his kingdom but "would not be able" (*Luke 13:23-24*). Consequently, he urged them to "strive to enter" (*Luke 13:24*).
- In addition to challenging his audience's beliefs about their place in his kingdom, he also challenged their understanding of others' place in it – "you yourselves [will be] cast out" but people from "east and west, and from north and south" will be welcomed (*Luke 13:28-29*).
- While we might expect a response of righteous indignation over the rejection he encountered, Jesus responded with lament, expressing his desire to gather everyone together like a hen gathers her chicks (*Luke 13:31-35*); **the crowd's rejection did not change Jesus' affection for them.**

## Applications

- Like Jesus, we should anticipate rejection when we tell people the Good News about him.
- Rejection, even widespread rejection, did not stop Jesus from continuing to tell people the Good News. Neither should we allow misunderstanding nor rejection to prevent us from telling people about Jesus.
- The majority of those who rejected Jesus' Good News were religious people. They did not reject him because they rejected God. Instead, they rejected Jesus because they gave greater weight to other concerns, concerns like:
    - Prejudice (*Luke 10:25-37; 18:9-17; 19:1-10*).
    - Worry (*Luke 10:38-42; 12: 22-34*).
    - The demands of citizenship in Jesus' kingdom (*Luke 14:25-33*).
    - The world's distractions (*Luke 18:18-30; 12:13-34*).
- A clear message emerges for us – we can claim to believe in the Good News about Jesus even while rejecting its place in our lives.
- Rejection did not change Jesus' love for the crowds (*Luke 13:31-35*), offering us two crucial reminders:
    - Jesus' love proves greater than our failures.
    - We should love others despite their failures.

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## Evening discussion

Generally, individuals and churches understand they have a responsibility to tell people about Jesus. Occasionally, motivated by a desire to obey Jesus, individuals and churches make unrealistic evangelistic plans; they fail to account for the widespread rejection Jesus encountered and that he taught defines the world's response to his Good News (*Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-24*).

Luke embeds his presentation of that rejection in a long series of teachings Jesus gave about his kingdom and its expectations (*Luke 9:51-19:40*). For example, Luke highlights Jesus' challenging teachings about:

- Loving your neighbor and your enemy (*Luke 10:25-37*).
- Wealth and possessions (*Luke 12:13-21; 16:1-15; 16:19-31; 18:18-30*).
- Trusting in God's care despite persecution (*Luke 12:1-11*).
- The cost of discipleship (*Luke 14:25-33*).
- Humility (*Luke 18:9-17*).

Even though he understood his teachings and expectations contributed to the rejection he encountered, Jesus neither apologized for their difficulty nor compromised them to accommodate the crowds. He did not change his teachings because they outline the identity of his kingdom and the character of the Good News he delivered. A key insight emerges from Jesus' teachings – the Good News transforms lives in the present. However, the changes demanded by the Good News require one to rethink their understanding of, and relationship to, the world, something many prove unwilling to do (*cf. Luke 18:18-23*). And, it is that unwillingness to change that leads to their rejection of the Good News.

## Discussion questions

What percentage of people you talk to about Jesus' Good News believe and commit to what he teaches?

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What reasons do you think motivate the rejection of the Good News, or what reasons do people offer you for their rejection?

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We need to be careful not to assume our presentation always accurately represents Jesus' kingdom and rule. In what ways do you think we might misrepresent the Good News? How can we more faithfully present Jesus' kingdom and rule to people?

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That widespread rejection Jesus taught about should prompt us to ask whether we have also rejected his kingdom *as he presented it* in favor of one more to our liking. In what ways do you think we can twist the Good News about Jesus' kingdom and rule to suit our preferences?

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Jesus' lament over Jerusalem reminds us that our responsibility centers on relationships rather than just the transmission of information (*Luke 13:31-35*). How do you think we can cultivate genuine, loving relationships with people who reject the Good News while not compromising the Gospel? How do you think those relationships can become a way to model the Good News when people reject our words?

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