

Straight Talking

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. I'm pleased to have a seat. Can everybody hear me okay? There I am. Excellent. Well, my name is Graham, the pastor here at the church, and it's a real joy to welcome you here, especially perhaps if this is your first time here, spoken to a few new folks. You're so welcome. We just hope you have a really encouraging time with us this morning, and particularly as we come to God's words now. So, can I invite you to turn back to Luke chapter 13 and those verses that Alice read for us earlier. So, we're going to camp out this morning as we get back into Luke. But as we come to God's word now, why don't we just pause and let's pray together. Father, we thank you so much for your goodness. Lord, you are a good, good God. And we thank you so much for the privilege it is to gather, Lord, as your people this morning and to sing your praises. Thank you for the truths that are included in those songs that we are singing, that we've been reminding ourselves that you are a big God. You are the creator of the ends of the earth, and you are worthy of all praise.

And so, as we turn to your words now, Father, we pray that you would speak deep into our lives, that we would leave here this morning, Father, changed because we've encountered you. So, Father, be with us now, we ask for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. One of the TV shows that Alex, my wife, and I love to watch is called Dragon's Den. I don't know if anyone else here loves a bit of Dragon's Den. But one of the stars of Dragon's Den, my favorite guy on the show, is this man. He's called Peter Jones. I just look at this guy. He's not great.

Six foot seven. Highly intelligent. Sharp dresser. Self-made millionaire. Oh, he's a cracking guy. Do you know why people love this man? They love Peter Jones because he's got a reputation for being a straight talker. In fact, so loved is he for this, that when it was rumored this time last year that he might run for prime minister, he was interviewed on this morning. I don't watch this morning, but he was interviewed on this morning, Philip Schofield, because he was thinking about becoming prime minister. Somebody tweeted in, I'd love Peter Jones to be prime minister.

He wouldn't mince his words. He'd tell us exactly how it is, and that's what we need. Hashtag this morning. I don't know about you, but maybe it's just a Scott in me that I love a straight talker.

[2 : 2 9] Love a straight talker. In our world of photoshopping, in our world of spin doctoring, I find it so refreshing when somebody just tells me the truth of how things are. And what we're going to see this morning as we get into Luke 13 is we're going to hear three truths from the straight talking Jesus. Three truths from the straight talking Jesus. So if you've got Luke 13 there, let me just, before we dive into it, and particularly since we've taken a break from Luke over the summer, it's worth getting our bearings as to where we are in Luke's story.

And so by way of quickly refreshing our memories, let me just draw your attention as we kind of skim the first 13 chapters to two words. And they both begin with C, because I love alliteration. Here's the first C. It has to do with the reason why Luke has written his gospel in the first place, and it's the word certainty. Luke has written this account, this gospel for Theophilus, this man who's commissioned him to go and do a bit of detective work.

So, Luke, if you go and research the facts, if you uncover every stone, if you speak to the witnesses, if you hunt from top to bottom, and if you present that to me, then I can know for myself the truth about this man Jesus Christ. And Luke, the good doctor that he is, he's done just that, and he's put this material together in a way that is coherent and logical so that Theophilus can have confidence that Jesus is who he says he is. Now, the second C has to do with where we are in the story. That's the word cross. Verse 21 of chapter 9, maybe you just want to skim there, back a few pages. Jesus is resolutely on his way to the city of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, where he's going to go and he's going to offer up his life of his free will on the cross.

And so, on his way to Jerusalem, as he's been encountering people, he's been teaching both his disciples and the watching world what it means to truly follow after him. So, that's the big question of where we are in Luke's gospel at this point. What does it mean to follow this king? And straight off the back, and I suggest that that is a wonderful question to ask yourself this morning.

What does it truly mean to follow after this king? So, it's into this backdrop that Jesus delivers his three straight-talking truths. Now, if you want to follow along this morning, the first truth is found at verses 1 to 9, and it's a truth for the people. So, we pick up the story, travel with me, verse 1, with Jesus, who at this point in time is gaining both in popularity and he's raising eyebrows.

[5 : 19] He's confronted by some people desperate to know his take on current events. Now, we don't know much about the specifics of these events, but the people know, check it out, that Pilate, the Roman official, has had some Galileans put to death. And Jesus knows of a similar tragedy and Siloam when a tower has collapsed, killing 18 people. Real lives have been lost here, and real pain has been suffered here.

And as you can imagine, there's some real questions to be asked here. And the people must have been asking Jesus, why did this happen? Why did this happen? It's a real question.

But we need to get to the mindset behind their question. I was trying to ask myself this week in preparation, trying to put myself in the shoes of these people who are asking Jesus, what answer are they looking for?

What are they wanting Jesus to clarify? And even though the people don't say it, Jesus hears this mindset in their voices, and he knows that it's lurking in their hearts.

Because they look on at current events, and they think that these people, these Galileans, must have done something so horrible in the sight of God, for God to allow something so horrible to happen to them. Let's flip it another way around, the equation.

[6 : 46] It's that extraordinary tragedy equals extraordinary guilt. So they look at these current events, and that is how they perceive what has happened. That's how they understand what has happened.

And if you think about it, by implication then, that means because I'm alright, because I'm not suffering like these people have suffered, it must mean that I'm doing alright. It must mean I'm doing okay.

I don't know if you... I mean, really, it's just karma playing out, isn't it, in religious dress? It's karma. I don't know if you've reminded me this week of the old saying about the karma restaurant, where you go and there's no menus, you just get served what you deserve.

This is karma. This is how people view and understand these current events. And so they ask Jesus, what do you make of this Jesus? Tell us how we're supposed to understand this.

And this week of all weeks, I guess that is a very real and a very raw question, is it not? As we look at our news, as we look at Hurricane Irma causing devastation in the Caribbean, and as we look at the strongest earthquake in a decade hitting Mexico, what was it, killing 60 people?

[8 : 04] And if you look at the floods in Houston that happened only a couple of weeks ago, and this question all of a sudden becomes really raw and really live, doesn't it? And so I guess as a reader looking onto this, I'm really interested to see how the one through whom all creation was made answers that question.

How is Jesus going to answer this question? Is he going to be like a politician? Is he going to duck the question and answer another one? Is that the thing that's what I would have done?

Is he going to duck it? No. Do you see how he emphatically answers that question? No. No. And Jesus, the master teacher that he is, he answers their question by telling them not only that they are asking the wrong question, but he directs them towards asking the right question.

The question is not primarily, why do these things happen in life? Although that is a real question. The question you need to be asking yourself is, what does the fact that these things happen in life tell you about life?

You know, it was C.S. Lewis who said that pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Time is short.

[9 : 24] This is what Jesus is saying. Life is fragile. And the world is not as it was created to be. And the most urgent issue, says Jesus, it's not other people's souls.

It's your soul. If you don't get right with God, you too are going to, what's the word he uses? Perish. If you don't get right with God, the reality check here for these people is that judgment is coming for you.

One day you will stand before your creator. And so will you listen to God on his megaphone? Rico Tice, the author of *The Christianity Explored*, tells this story about how he was swimming in Australia one time.

Really wanted to go swimming. So off he gets with his top. Down he heads to the water. He's all about to jump in. And his friend shouts over, Rico, what are you doing? And Rico says, I really want to go for a swim.

And his friend points to a sign that says, Shark's Danger. And Rico says, I really want to go for a swim. And his friend says, well, listen, you do whatever you want, mate. You do whatever you want. But you've got to ask yourself at some point, is that warning sign there to kill your joy?

[10 : 38] Or is it there to save your life? And that's exactly how Jesus' words come to these first hearers and exactly how they come to us this morning.

Here is a loving warning from the King of Kings. And what does he call on people to do? Repent. Greek word there, metanoia. Present tense word, turn.

Turn from trusting in yourself and living for yourself. Realize the road that you're on. And turn and trust in and live for God. For what is it we were singing earlier? For he alone can rescue.

And as if to drive home this point, he tells them this parable of verse 6 of a man who owns a vineyard. In that vineyard there was a fig tree and that fig tree is just not performing as it should.

The tree should have been full of fruit, but year after year he comes back and he looks on this tree and he's just massively disappointed. How long has this tree had in the passage?

[11 : 35] Three years. Quite rightly, the owner questions, why should this unproductive tree continue to take up space in my vineyard? The vine dresser pleads the case of the fig tree, convinces the owner to give it another year, and we're not hopeful, but the fig tree has one more year to produce fruit.

And like that unfruitful fig tree, the invitation to the people is to take advantage of the grace, the space for grace before judgment comes.

First truth from the straight-talking Jesus, time is short. Time is short. I don't want to dwell too long here this morning. I want to allow Jesus' words to speak for themselves, except to ask you to ponder in the quietness of your own heart whether you need to do business with God this morning.

And if you think about it, the very fact that God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, has come down to find us, has stepped into our mess to tell us this, is quite amazing.

the lengths that God has gone to to get this message to us. Why? Because he loves us. And the lengths went further still as this man, this man who presents this warning, is on his way to the cross to do what?

[13 : 00] To lay down his life, to die for people's sins so that we could be reconciled to the God who made us. That is the first truth, and that is a heavy truth this morning, the first truth from the straight-talking Jesus.

is that time is running out. It's a truth for the people. Second truth, verses 10 to 17, is a truth for the leaders. Verse 10, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue one Sabbath day, and who does he see there?

He sees a woman. Now it's really interesting, if you want to follow it with me, look how Luke tells this story. What does he know about this woman?

What are we told about this woman? That she was disabled. Verse 11, she was bent over, and she could not stand up. Now how long has she been like that? She's been like it 18 years.

Now that's a long time. 18 years. Just picture that in your mind. 18 years. Got some students here this morning, that is four and a half degrees. 18 years.

[14 : 05] This woman has been like this. And we've got to say, this woman as we meet her here, doesn't have an awful lot going for her. In fact, she epitomizes everything that Luke has been telling us so far about those who are lowly, about those who are poor.

And notice that Jesus sees her. And there's a wonderful truth there, that this woman didn't come forward to Jesus asking him to help her out. The initiative here is all of Jesus.

It is all of Jesus. And is that not a wonderful truth to ponder this morning? That he came down to find us. The initiative is all his in this passage. Jesus sees her, and he has compassion on her.

He speaks to her. He lays his hand on her, as if to signify, I'm getting involved in this woman's pain. And he heals her.

Now it is a beautiful Christ that we're presented with in these verses. A wonderful Jesus. Luke wants us to see that. Jesus gets involved in this woman's pain.

[15 : 11] He heals her. Here is another miracle announcing that the kingdom of God is here. Why? Because Jesus the King is here. And what is the result? She glorifies God. Glorifies God.

Worship fills the synagogue. And we're thinking, yes, hallelujah. But not everybody feels that worship. Not everybody feels that sense of joy.

Verse 14. We're introduced to this synagogue ruler. And look how Luke describes him. He's not just indifferent to what Jesus has done. He's indignant at what Jesus has done.

We get the image there. His nostrils are flaring up. He is angry at what Jesus has done. Why? Not because of what Jesus has done. Because of when Jesus has done it.

When has he done it? He's done it on the Sabbath. And look how this guy interacts here with the crowd. Does he speak to Jesus? No. He piously addresses the crowd about Jesus.

[16:14] Verse 14. You get six days to do that stuff. You get six other days to do that stuff. And understandably, the straight-talking Jesus takes exception to this man.

What does he call him? You hypocrite. You hypocrites. He's talking about the lot of them. Because somehow it's become the norm to not view caring for your ox and your donkey in the Sabbath as work.

But it's become the norm to view healing on the Sabbath as work. But more to the point, this man cares more for the health of his donkey than he does for the health of this woman.

The very leaders of God's people who are supposed to be giving themselves for these people, supposed to be leading these people in obeying the word of the Lord, leading them in worship.

And here they are, because of their hard hearts, neglecting God's people. And how they are treating this, what phrase does Jesus use, this daughter of Abraham?

[17:14] is case in point. I remember when I was a student, many moons ago, when I first lived on my own, my mom would phone me and she would say more than this, but she would often ask me, Graham, have you cleaned the oven?

Have you cleaned the oven? And I would reply to her, Mom, I have nailed the oven. I have nailed the oven. And do you know what I meant by that? That's it. I've cleaned the outside.

That's what I meant. I'd cleaned the outside. Mom, I've nailed it. So Mom would come up and she'd visit. And she wouldn't head straight for the oven, but I knew it was in her head. And she would go to the oven and she would see the pristine oven.

She would just open the door and she would look in and she would say, Graham, you've got to be kidding me. So what Jesus is doing here with these hearts, of these people, he's just opening the oven door.

What he finds is he opens this oven door, something clean in the outside, but something not pretty in the inside.

[18:24] Second truth from the straight talk in Jesus is that your hearts are bad. Do you notice that Luke tells us about these two groups? Jesus' adversaries, so those with hearts, just like the synagogue ruler, rejecting Christ and the people.

And what are they doing? They're rejoicing at what God has done. And as Luke tells us this story, Theophilus, check out this guy's heart. And as readers, we're invited to ask ourselves this morning that if Jesus were to open that oven door of our hearts, what would he find inside?

What would he find inside? Would he find somebody just cleaning the outside, but playing at it on the inside? And we're invited to ask, which group are we in? One commentator writes, Jesus is too great a figure to be left to neutrality.

It's a great quote. Where are you this morning in relation to the Lord? The second truth from the straight talking Jesus is a truth for the leaders. And the third truth this morning and finally is verses 18 to 21.

And it's a truth for the disciples. So Jesus addressing those listening tells them a reality about the kingdom of God. And it's simile time. I love similes.

[19 : 38] Simile time. What is the kingdom of God like? Now you can imagine you're in the crowd. The rising anticipation levels at this point as to what this man is going to say. What is he going to say next?

Oh, I can't wait to hear it. Is the kingdom of God, is it like the blazing sun? Is it when it comes and all its radiance, is it going to blitz away all the darkness? Is it like, is it like that scene in Aladdin when Prince Ali comes to town with the elephants in the parade?

Is this king going to come in and just blitz the place? Oh boy, I can't wait to hear what he says. What simile will Jesus choose? Well, it's a rhetorical question. Do you like rhetorical questions?

Just checking. It's a test. You're still awake. Jesus answers this question for them. What is the kingdom of God like? What is it like? It's like a mustard seed.

It's like a what? It's like a mustard seed. The smallest seed that these people could imagine. Barely visible to the eye. And it's like that, a small pinch of yeast that you would add to three measures of flour.

[20 : 43] Three measures of flour, 50 pounds of dough. That's the similes that Jesus gives you for the kingdom of God. Like a tiny little mustard seed and like a teensy little bit of leaven.

Now, what would your word associations be if you were in the crowd listening to this? Unimpressive. Insignificant. This is the kingdom of God? Imagine you were one of the people listening in.

What would you have made of Jesus' words here? Because there are two truths at the heart of what he says here. Firstly, and again, alliteration, forgive me, the posture of the kingdom.

If the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, then Jesus is the mustard seed king. Now, we've seen that all the way through Luke's gospel so far. Born to a peasant girl.

Born in a stable. Hanging out with sinners. A bunch of unimpressive looking followers. Rejected by his own. This is this king. And here he is inviting people to come and follow him.

[21 : 46] To follow the guy who is being persecuted. To follow the man with the target on his back. To follow the guy who has just gone public with the fact that he is journeying by his own accord to his death.

But following straight off the back of the posture of the kingdom comes the promise of the kingdom. That even though this may look insignificant and even though the lives of the people if they decide to follow Jesus will look insignificant, Jesus wants his disciples to know that no matter how insignificant and foolish looking it looks, that the kingdom of God comes with heaven's guarantee that God will make it grow.

And he'll make it grow and he'll transform it from something menial and he'll grow it to something magnificent. This is the promise. The third truth from the straight talking Jesus to those who would follow after him is the kingdom of God might look unimpressive but God is going to make it grow.

And so as we work towards a close this morning let me just make two points by way of application. So this mustard seed king is here calling his followers to embrace and adopt mustard seed lives.

So to follow this king, to follow Jesus is to sign up for a life that is very unimpressive. Now let me ask you when was the last time in your life that you felt unimpressive for following Jesus?

[23 : 16] Alex and I were at a wedding down south a few months ago and one of those strange weddings where we knew nobody apart from the bride and the groom and being an extrovert I loved that challenge so I'm speaking to people giving away my game secrets here but my first question where are you from?

Second question what do you do? Going around in a circle speaking to people one guy owns the local award winning restaurant great chap really good guy next person doctor next person working in sustainable development next person working in the charity sector and I'm just waiting for it I know it's coming Green what do you do?

I'm a pastor of a church I'm a minister of a church conversation dead dead never seen people head for the canopy so quick in my life conversation dead and I felt unimpressive for following this king unimpressive when did you last feel unimpressive for following this king as we embrace this lifestyle think about it tomorrow you'll be asked I'm sure for those of you who go to the office who work what did you do yesterday I went to church and imagine for a lot of us that is conversation over so what do we do in those moments well following the mustard seed king is tough as we embrace his lifestyle what he's calling us to do here the posture but let's be so encouraged by the mustard seed king's promise because we stand here what a glorious privilege it is to stand where we do in history we stand in God's story at this point and I guess in particular we stand the other side of the cross we know the mustard seed king met a cross shaped death and if ever there was a mustard seed moment in this man's life in history surely it was Calvary

Jesus suspended on the cross surrounded by a handful of followers most of whom have scattered from him but the truth that this king rose and this king has ascended and this king rules and this king reigns and this king's church by his spirit it grew and it grew and it grew now what odds would you have got back in 33 roughly AD that 2000 odd years later not only would we be here but our voices would join in with an estimated 2.2 billion people around the world who are following this king surely that would make 5000 to 1 unless the city winning the league a few years ago looked like child's play would it not and yet here we stand this morning knowing the truth of that and the incredible news is that this king's church is still growing and it's still growing and it's still growing you know I heard a statistic recently that it's estimated I don't know how they figure this stuff out but it's estimated that in China 19,000 people come to faith in Jesus a day a day and that's estimated to go as high as 48,000 in 2025 now so often our problem is that we take how we see things going out here and we just project it onto the world this king's kingdom is growing and we might not experience anything like those numbers in Scotland but let me tell you

I've been so encouraged this week and over the past few weeks to speak from church leaders from across the country and to hear about so many churches being planted in our nation Huntley Haddington Dundee Livingston Inverness Aberdeen why?

[26 : 54] because this promise is true that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed it looks unimpressive it has small beginnings but our great God will grow it into something spectacular as he saves men and women boys and girls from across this globe who put their faith in his son Jesus Christ and in this all glorious and all conquering king he will grow it and because I see and because this is where we should end this morning because we see the proof of that truth it should encourage us to build our lives on every single word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord that's the confidence we can take this morning these straight talking truths from the straight talking king are hard but we can build our lives because we see the proof of the truth crown him the Lord of heaven enthroned in worlds above crown him the king to whom is given the wondrous name of love crown him with many crowns as thrones before him fall crown him ye kings with many crowns for he is king of all three truths from the straight talking

Jesus this morning Luke chapter 13 time is short your hearts are bad the kingdom will grow just before we pray why don't we just have a moment of silence just for a few moments as we allow just before we head into a busy week let's just allow God's word by his spirit to fill our minds and our hearts just before we finish and so maybe just in the quiet I wonder if some of us need to crown him the Lord of all to take our crown off our own heads and to place it on Christ Father we thank you so much this morning that you are a good God Father thank you so much for the truth of your word that we have it in our own language that we can read it Father that we have the freedom to meet together to worship you and Father we ask ask Lord that you would help us to heed the truth of your word this morning and you would help us to hold to the truth of your word this morning

Father may Jesus be ever more glorious in our eyes as a result of us being here this morning and it's in his glorious name we pray Amen