

22 *And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; 27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 28 "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out. 29 "And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. 30 "And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."*

I was down repairing the water heater at my mom's house about a month ago and I was sitting outside on the little patio just enjoying some fellowship with Jamie Hamilton, the erstwhile pastor at First Baptist Tonopah, and we were sort of comparing notes, which ultimately got me in a little trouble, but that's another story, we were comparing notes and Jamie asked me if I give an invitation at the end of my sermons.

Jesus has been giving an invitation to the multitude now for a chapter and a half. Chapter 12 is the formal sermon that is in it's entirety, an invitation. But Jesus invitation doesn't sound anything like what we're used to today if you've been with any of the groups who practice the invitation system. We were part of those groups for many years.

I have a booklet on my crowded shelf written by Iain Murray titled *The Invitation System*. It's a history of how the church got where we are today. And Mr. Murray explains how the church gradually shifted from the biblical doctrine of election, where God chose whom He would save before the foundation of the world, to a system that divorces those truths and claims

salvation is totally man centered and man caused.

God's up in heaven watching the show, wringing His hands, hoping that some will choose Him, but the choice isn't His at all, it is totally under the control of the wills of men.

And beginning with that doctrinal error, men like Charles Finney, and later Billy Graham, believed that in the cause of getting men saved, anything goes. All's fair in love and war, and getting people saved. Thus a guy who can close a sale, a guy who has the gift of mind control and persuasion, that guy is far more valuable to the cause of Christ than someone like me who simply takes the book, does his best to make the sense of it, and depends on the Spirit of God to accomplish anything further that is lasting.

One camp is looking for good closer's. Get the deal. Get them to sign the card. Get them to get out of their seats and stream down those aisles. Sing the song verse 22 time. Get some tears flowing. Start small. Raise those hands. I see that hand. Then, put some guilt on them. If you really meant it, get out of that seat and come down to the front. Have your closers waiting at the front and close the deal. Pray the prayer.

The other camp is preaching the word of God and hoping the Spirit is using the words of God to change hearts. Edification. Building up faith. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Simple stuff. We throw out seed and it's up to God if anything grows. We're feeding sheep because the chief Shepherd told us to feed sheep. The rest is up to Him. He adds to His church.

So then, you end up with two camps. The one camp believes that only God can quicken dead sinners to life, and He does that according to His choice which aligns with His good pleasure. The chosen will ultimately be redeemed.

In God's good timing His chosen ones will hear and understand the good news of salvation and it's almost like God flips a switch and dead hearts come to life, blind eyes see, deaf ears can suddenly hear. The lights come on. And

from that moment forward, those folks have a strong desire to know God more.

Those lives that have been quickened to life by the Holy Spirit will all have in common that although they continue to fall and stumble and sin, their ultimate projection is to be more and more Godly and to please their Saviour.

The second camp, so to speak, in Big Eva; OK, definition of terms. Big Eva is a new - ish phrase that some authors use to speak of the entirety of the giant tent, the huge umbrella that encompasses and calls itself evangelicals. Christians.

The second camp are those who are in the majority, numerically, who believe salvation is totally under the control and discretion of men. Our job is to find new ways and methods to make that happen. So pragmatism is king of this camp. What works? Entire multi-million dollar industries thrive on the pragmatism of How do we get people saved. What do we adjust. What's working. There are magazines that have articles after articles about what's the latest thing that's working.

Since God has nothing to do in this process, it's all about convincing men's wills to be a christian, what can we do different that will cause the desired result. How can we lower the bar, so to speak, in order to sweep the most fish into the fish net?

In my lifetime, a non-exhaustive list of things that were once sort of taboo, and rightly so because they are forbidden in scripture, that are now just fine with the church would include, divorce, fornication of every kind, living with people you're not married to, engaging sexually with people of the same gender as you, arguing that there is no such thing as gender, jettisoning doctrine, doctrine divides, jettisoning the book as far as it having authority over what we can and can't do, jettisoning the belief in the infallibility and innerrancy of the book, and a whole host of other things that creates enmity with the world.

Like I said, that list is not exhaustive at all. Now add to that the anything goes mindset in the whole idea of the invitation system. Anything you can do to twist and control the emotions of your hearers is fair game. Anything! Music is wide open. What have you got that can get the fish into the net? Whatever it is, do it!

Like I said, the guy who can close deals is way more important than someone who can teach this book. We're over the book anyways. It's all about numbers and pretty much, anything goes. It gets pretty bizarre if you look into it a bit. Pretty nutty.

And the underlying reason for all the pragmatism in order to get people in is that we really don't like Jesus answer to this fellow's question. Are there only a few who are being saved? Are there only a few that God is saving? We don't like the obvious answer. We gauge success by numbers and we don't like the obvious numbers the way Jesus is doing this.

So the first thing you want to do is get rid of most of what Jesus said. Because Jesus has been telling us, there's a conflict with the world, and that to join with Him is to sign up for a war with this world. His invitation goes something like; Get ready for your family to hate you and perhaps kill you. Get ready to be ostracized from the prevailing religions. Get ready for the religious folks to tell everyone that you hate God and men. You're a hater.

Jesus says that in order to follow Him, you have to leave this world behind, whatever the cost of doing that turns out to be, and join His little rag tag group of nobodies and weirdo's.

Jesus method is diametrically opposed to the invitation system adopted by Big Eva. You couldn't possibly do anything worse than what Jesus is doing. And to their credit, the multitude, or at least some of them, those who were identified with the question raised for us this morning, they understood what Jesus was putting out there, and they were, in a word, astonished.

You've got to be kidding, Jesus. You have to get a divorce from this world

and it's systems and it's religions, even the Jewish religion, in order to join with you?? Follow you?? If that's true, then only a handful of people in this mob of thousands is actually going to heaven.

That's the question the guy asks, and it's the perfect question at this point in Luke's progression. Jesus gives an invitation but the cost to follow Him seems absurd. Leave the world. Join a little band of losers. Follow Jesus right out of this world completely. This guy understood what Jesus was selling, and frankly, he's a little astonished! Amazed! This seems absurd, Jesus. Nobody will pay your price. Heaven will be empty. Mostly.

*22 And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*

Luke gives us our context and our time frame. Way back in Luke 9:51 this resolute journey to the cross began. *51 And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem;*

We are looking at the final weeks and months of Jesus' earthly ministry, and for Luke, that encompasses over 2/3rds of his book. Jesus is going from city to city giving this final call to Israel. Nobody's buying it. Well, almost nobody. And Jesus is an effective teacher. The question this man raises is because he understands very well what Jesus is teaching.

Salvation for Israel comes through their Messiah. Jesus claims to be that person. But nobody's buying it. Almost nobody. A few losers. Offscouring of the earth type people. Harlots and tax collectors seem to dig Him. A few ignorant fishermen from the region of Galilee. Losers, sinners, ignorant hicks. That's about it.

And this guy does the math, and says, if you're who you say you are, heaven's going to be pretty spartan, because nobody's buying what you're selling. Especially the religious rulers who are the rock stars in that particular world.

All of the important people hate you Jesus. All of the top religious mucky mucks who are the movers and shakers of this place, reject you. Those guys hate you. They want you dead. This really doesn't seem to add up, Jesus.

And you know what. From the limited perspective that this guy could see with his eyes, he was right. Not looking too good Jesus. The religious rulers are going to kill you, and the followers are a really small number. And not only a small number, but really a bunch of insignificant people who have joined themselves with Jesus and His cause.

120 people in the room waiting for the Holy Spirit after Jesus rose and ascended into heaven. Not exactly the sand of the seashore or the stars in the sky. A little handful of losers was present that day. That's all.

But what this fellow couldn't see and the pragmatists today refuse to see is that the kingdom looks insignificant, the numbers don't work, but God is going to gather His chosen ones into His kingdom for the next 2000 years. He doesn't need any help from Big Eva lowering all the bars and gathering in a whole bunch of tares.

*“Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”* What a great question, then, and now.

We compare the number in this room with the number who dwell here in Tonopah, and it's consistently about 1%, or a little less. It's not looking too good.

When God destroyed all mankind the first time, estimates for world population vary. It was in the millions. God saved eight. Noah, his three sons and all of the wives. Looking at those odds, 1% is pretty generous.

*And He said to them, 24 “Strive to enter by the narrow door;*

Strive to enter. Enter what. The kingdom. The authority to reign of God, both in this world and the next. The question was about salvation. Are there

only a few who are being sozo-menoi.

The greek word sozo is the root word for Saviour, Salvation, and this man's question is about the act itself of being rescued. Are there just a few then who are being rescued? Rescued out of this world that is perishing into your kingdom that is eternal?

Our world today laughs. Although they're not laughing quite so much since Covid. Slightly less funny. Rescued? Saved? From what, exactly?

Noah preached for 120 years while he built the ark. The people then laughed at him too. Rescued from what, exactly, Noah. Rain? What is rain? What is the purpose of this monstrosity you're building. We don't need to be rescued. You're ridiculous. And then the tidal wave came and it was over in minutes.

Rescued from what? In the book of revelation, at the last, when Christ returns in glory and judgement against the rebellion of this world, an angel calls for the birds to come and eat the flesh of all men. All men, the great and the small. There's no distinction between kings and slaves. Like the flood of Noah, the judgement is universal.

Sin is an offense to God. It is a rebellion we're born into. And God will judge all sin and rebellion. It's universal. Salvation is rescue from judgement. These folks understood that, perhaps better than we do.

What they're questioning is the obvious low number of people who have changed sides in the conflict. Even in this multitude of thousands the number who have believed that Jesus is Messiah and joined with Him are really small. And the quality, from the world's measurement criteria, the quality of the ones who have sided with Jesus; well, let's just say, they aren't choice people. Not by this world's standards.

They were expecting a Messiah who would come and join with their religious leaders and make Israel a world power. A great physical kingdom that would crush their enemies.

Instead Jesus brings in a spiritual kingdom that deals with forgiveness of sin. Jesus kingdom makes men acceptable to God. Jesus offers a kingdom where His righteousness is freely given to those who come to Him. His kingdom is a kingdom of peace with God. Instead of being judged, in Him we become the judges. Instead of being rebellious enemies of the Creator, we become His friends, His children, His guarded choice possessions.

What looks so small to the world, becomes huge. What looks so insignificant in value to the world, becomes precious stones to God. Jewels.

Jesus doesn't address the question directly. Is it just a few who are being saved. That's pretty obvious. What Jesus does address is; strive to leave the many and join the few. Do whatever it takes to come out of the many and join the few. Fight to do that.

*23 And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter by the narrow door;*

The reason the number is small is because the door of entrance into Jesus kingdom, is narrow. It is constrained. In verse 24 the word translated strive is Agōnizesthe. We get our word agonize. It's the word that is used in an athletic contest for the one who fights, the one who strains to the uttermost to win.

Agōnizesthe is the word for ultimate effort. Work hard to enter the kingdom. What in the world! Jesus would fail all of our evangelism classes. People can't work their way to heaven! No amount of agony and effort can make us acceptable to God. What's going on here? Where is the disconnect between what Jesus tells His audience and what Big Eva is selling in 2020? How do we harmonize what Jesus says here, with what Paul says in Ephesians 2:8,9

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*

Who's right? Isn't this a contradiction, and can we not then throw our Bibles on the dust heap? Jesus says one thing, Paul says another?

Jesus says the door, the way, the entrance into salvation is narrow. Difficult. Agonizing effort is necessary to arrive at the right entrance. There is difficulty because of the narrowness of the entry point. What He's saying has nothing to do with working your way to heaven.

In fact working your way to heaven is in fact, the wide road. The wide highway that all religions are on. You can work your way to God with enough effort. That's the big wide highway the world is on. Works righteousness.

Jesus says the effort is in the struggle to find the real entrance in the midst of all the false ones. The effort, the struggle is in the fight with yourself. Because in order to have Jesus, and Jesus is that single and only narrow way, in order to have Jesus, it costs you . . . you.

You can retain control over you on any of the other paths on the wide road to hell. In fact in every case, whatever the name stamped on the big wide highway, it's all about you. This highway will make you a better you. Be the best you that you can be! All of them.

Jesus is the narrow obscure difficult door to life, but it's narrow and difficult and agonizing and trust me, there will be a fight, because Jesus requires you to give up . . . you. The battle is for control over you. Who's going to own you?

Listen to Jesus in John chapter 7. Same time frame. He said this within weeks of our passage this morning. 17 *“If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.”* Jn. 7:17

The battle, the struggle is in accepting that the only way to God is through Jesus and the only way Jesus will have you, is if He gets ALL of you. The agony of the struggle is in letting go of you. The verse in John is the fulcrum

of the teeter totter. Are you willing. Are you willing to give all of YOU to Jesus. Are you willing for you to die, the old you, and then are you willing to be the new YOU with Jesus at the helm . . . instead of you.

Are you beginning to see why this is all so narrow. Why the door is small. Why few find it. And yes, the answer to the man's question *is* few. First of all, it's Jesus, and only Jesus. No other ways to God. Only Jesus.

*I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father, but by Me. Jn 14:6 There is salvation in NO other name, for there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved. Acts 4:12*

Jesus is the single and only door to salvation. Rescue from the sure and certain judgement resulting from the condemnation of sin and rebellion that this perishing world is sentenced to happens only one way. Jesus is the door to safety. That's it. No other ways to safety. All other roads All other ways, all other doors, lead to perdition.

The exclusivity of that gospel of salvation is fighting words to this world. You want to make people angry. Just tell them that they are condemned to perish in flames and the only solution is the Jesus of this book. The world hates the narrowness of God's door. It makes them furious. Crazy insane furious.

So there's that, and even if you won that battle and narrow it down to Jesus, only, then there's still the battle inside. Jesus demands to have you. Period. He won't settle for less than ALL of you. You have to be willing to kill you and accept the you that He creates in it's place.

That's the very definition of few. What are the chances of that happening. What are the odds. Well, Jesus gives us odds. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for anyone to recognize that Jesus is the way, and then give everything to Jesus in order to have Him.

Impossible is the odds of this happening. Totally impossible. Camels going

through needle eyes are easier than people recognizing who Jesus is and then giving all of themselves to Him to die and be re-created how He wants you to be. Totally impossible. For us. But not for God.

In Matthew 19 and Luke 18 we have the story of the rich young ruler. I've chosen the words from Matthew because we'll be in Luke 18 soon enough.

*23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Matt. 19:23 - 26

Bear in mind that in our culture, all of us are rich. In this culture of all about YOU, all of us are in a worse spot than this rich man was then, as far as meeting Jesus demand to own us. By the way, it's a foreign thought these days, but that's what the title Lord, means.

Understanding the mathematics of salvation; impossibly narrow entrance impossibly constrained way to be acceptable to God, and even more impossible demand. The math only works if God causes it all.

So then, what about those alter calls? The answer is difficult. Paul worked hard to persuade people, sometimes even with tears. 2 Cor. 5:11 *Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men,*

But that's where it stops. When the information is transmitted, with clarity, and even with emotion sometimes. That's the end of what I can do. We pray every time we speak for the Spirit to come and supply the power in the words. God's words. We do that because we understand and believe Jesus. This is impossible. All of it. Unless God steps in and causes salvation.

All the alter calls in the world cannot do the impossible thing. Jesus said it. I

believe it. Are there only a few who are being saved? Yes, and once I've declared what this book says, that's the end of what I can do and the beginning of what only God can do.

We are the farmer who throws the seed into the field. We can't make it grow. All we can do is wait for God to cause the tree to grow. But we DO have to throw seeds. We are responsible for that part.

We are the woman who puts the leaven into the lump of dough. But we can't cause the magic inside the dough. The yeast causes the dough to expand and it's out of our control. But we do have to add the leaven.

We have a tough time with these concepts. We don't like it that there isn't more that we can do. Paul says to the corinthians; *5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.* 1 Cor. 3:5 - 7

I think it's really interesting that we are witnessing an era closing. We are living in a sea change. Getting people into stadiums and having an impassioned speaker give a message and an alter call where people come streaming down to the infield, may be a footnote in history now.

The whole covid phenomenon has closed that door. We weren't doing that any more so much now anyways, but now the possibility isn't even there. And we are in a waiting pattern to see how the entire mega church idea can survive with all of the new government imposed sanctions.

But here is something remarkable. God's method of adding to His kingdom one person at a time throwing and watering seeds works just as well no matter what happens. We can keep planting seeds, one seed at a time, from 6 feet away, even with a face mask on.

Finally, this morning, someone may be asking the question, how can I be sure

that I'm included in the few, the small number, that belongs to Jesus?

Again, we go to something Paul told the corinthians. 2 Corinthians 13:5. Paul has a self test for us. He says; *5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?*

The Holy Spirit of God dwells in us. The Holy Spirit quickens us to life. Spiritual life. How does that happen? How do we become christians and have God living inside us? This time it's Jesus who clarifies, not Paul. We had this verse a few weeks ago in chapter 11.

*"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"* Luke 11:13

Ask Him to come into you and own you. It's really that simple.