

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Gospel in Perspective

Scripture: Luke 9:23-26

Code: 42-122

Well, we find ourselves at the heart of the message of Jesus, Luke chapter 9. We're looking at a paragraph that begins in verse 23 and really runs down to verse 26. We'll see how verse 27 is connected later.

These are the words of Jesus that are at the very heart of His gospel. Let me read the text to you, 9:23. Luke writes, "And He was saying to *them* all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.' "

The gospel according to Jesus Christ given in the New Testament is radically different from the typical modern message that is so often preached. In our contemporary times evangelists often portray Jesus as a somewhat frustrated, would-be Redeemer who stands outside anxiously awaiting an invitation from someone to come into his life. This is, I think, because of a misrepresentation of a text in the book of Revelation in which the Lord says He stands at the door and knocks. It's not really a true interpretation to make that the door of a human heart. It's the door of the church. It's Christ wanting to come into His church in the context there. But based on that verse, we have sort of portrayed Jesus as waiting for an invitation from us, waiting for an opportunity from us, standing quietly, as it were, by until we make the decision to invite Him in.

But in reality, the New Testament presents Christ as the inviter, the Savior who comes into the world, God in human flesh who invades the realm of humanity, who confronts sinners, challenges them, calls them, commands them to come to Him, to believe in Him, to turn from sin, to embrace Him as Savior and Lord. Rather than waiting for an invitation from sinners, He issues His own invitation to sinners in the form of a command to repent, and to believe, and to submit. And this is essentially what He is saying in our text. This is at the very core of Jesus' message, the gospel message. If you want eternal life, if you desire to have all your sins forgiven forever, if you want to come into the eternal kingdom of God, and receive blessing, peace and joy forever and ever, Jesus says here's what you need to do.

Look at verse 23. "If anyone wishes to come after Me - " you want to follow after Me, be My disciple, come into My kingdom, receive My forgiveness, here's what you must do. "Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Now, as we have been saying over the last couple of weeks looking at this passage, this is a gospel invitation. Jesus initiates the invitation to sinners and He clarifies the terms: Self denial, cross bearing daily, and loyal obedient following. Now we have called this the principle that is at the heart of Jesus' message. And we have learned over the last couple of weeks that coming after Christ, becoming a disciple of Christ, receiving salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life, entering God's kingdom calls for and demands self suicide, the death of self, a willingness to embrace suffering, persecution, and maybe execution, which is pictured by the torturous cross, and does require submission. That is to say becoming a Christian is not easy. Being saved is not easy. You don't just roll out of bed and find yourself in the kingdom of God.

It was said of Matthew in his own gospel as his story is reported and he is the writer that Jesus came by one day and saw him. He was a tax collector, the most despicable of all people in Jewish society, a Jew who had sold his soul to Rome for money. Jesus came along and amazingly said to Matthew, "Follow Me." Matthew records his own response. He did that. He walked away from his profession, which he could never return to since a tax franchise was a very desirable thing by traitorous Jews, and once Matthew abandoned his post, somebody would have been immediately taking his place. He never would have been able to go back. So he did forsake his career and all that went with it.

In fact, when Luke tells the story of Matthew's conversion, Luke adds in 5:28 that he left everything behind. That's exactly what Jesus is saying. If you're going to come after Me, if you want to be one of Mine, belong to Me, be saved from sin, be in My kingdom, it will cost you everything. You walk away from everything.

And what do we mean by that, "everything"? We're talking about those things that are a part of self. In fact, a good way to understand what that means is to drop down to verse 25. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" This is hyperbole. This is impossible, of course, no one person could literally possess the entire world. But what if you could? What if you could have everything that the world has? What would you have? Well this is what you would have according to 1 John 2:15. "All that is in the world *is* the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." And it's all passing away and it's all perishing. And if that's what you want, you can't have God. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

So what are we talking about when we talk about the world? All that your passions hunger for, all that your eyes covet, and all that your pride demands. What if you got all of it? What if you had every lust fulfilled? Every vision acquired? And every self aggrandizement available? Every honor won? What would it matter? If you got all of that in time and lost your soul eternally, how much is your soul worth?

So, Jesus when He says, "Let him deny himself," is basically saying deny everything that yourself longs for in the world. Because if you could gain the whole world, you'd make a bad bargain because it would cost you your soul. So this is how it is. You have lived - all men do - driven by the passions of desire to fulfill their bodily desires, driven by the passions of vision, coveting what they can see, driven by the immense desire to be honored, rewarded, esteemed, to be powerful, all that pride envelops. This is how we all live our lives.

And that's exactly what you have to give up. You have to say, "I no longer care about what my lust craves. I no longer care about what my eyes see. I no longer care about what my proud heart wants. In fact, as I look at it all, I see it as sin and so I deny myself." To deny myself is to say "no" to all of those cravings that are part of the fabric of fallenness.

So Jesus says - here's the principle - "If you want to come after Me, you deny yourself." You say, "I no longer will live for my own bodily lusts. I no longer will live for the things I can see. I no longer will live for my own self glorification. And I am willing to deny myself, and if need be, I will even give my life in death on a cross, and I commit myself to follow obediently." That's the gospel of Jesus. That's what He's calling for.

It's an attitude of penitence, repentance, brokenness, contrition, poverty of spirit, sense of your own bankruptcy, mourning, meek, sorrowful over your sin. It's the level of desperation that beats on the chest and says, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That says, "In my flesh is no good thing." This is the heart of Jesus' message, and if a sinner is going to come after Jesus into the kingdom, it's going to be in an absolute and total abandonment of himself. And we've been looking at that in the last couple of weeks.

Now this is paradoxical, as verse 24 says. So we've gone from the principle to the paradox. Verse 24 says, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it. Whoever loses his life for My sake, he's the one who will save it." That's the paradox. In order to gain your life eternally, you have to give your life up. If you hold onto your life, that is if you hold onto your life in the world and you do not want to give up your lusts, and your longings, and your desires, and your pride; you will forfeit your eternal soul. The only one who enters My kingdom is the one who gives himself up.

This teaching of Jesus, by the way, is not certainly isolated to this portion of Luke. It is scattered throughout all the gospels, all four of the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record Jesus teaching this. The words are the same in some other places and they vary in some other places. Jesus gives this message time and time again in various places and events. This is at the heart of His gospel. And the question is if you want salvation, are you willing to give up the earthly for the heavenly? Are you willing to give up the kingdom of men for the kingdom of God? Are you willing to give up the temporal for the eternal? Are you willing to give up the sinful for the holy?

I know that's not easy. And the gospel has to be presented on that basis. Today we want to make it as easy as possible and so we have this poor, sad Jesus waiting there for some sinner to come to his senses and invite Him in. That's just not going to happen. It's frankly impossible for any sinner to do that, to awaken himself from the dead, to give sight to his blind eyes, hearing to his deaf ears, and soften his hard heart. It's not easy to become a Christian. In fact, it's impossible. In fact, it's actually a violent experience.

Let me show you another passage of Scripture that fits perfectly into this that will illustrate what our Lord is saying here. Turn to the 7th chapter of Matthew which, of course, gets us in the sermon on the mount, the greatest evangelistic sermon ever. And in the sermon on the mount, as Jesus is presenting His message, His gospel, He gives an invitation at the end in verse 13 by way of a command. Matthew 7:13. "Enter - " He's telling them to come into the kingdom. "Enter - " that's a command "by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

No passage in Scripture more clearly and directly attacks the modern kind of easy believism with more power than this passage. This is not a very encouraging passage for those who think they're forgiven and saved from hell by some casual belief in the facts about Jesus Christ. These closing words of the sermon on the mount are pure gospel, they are as pointed an invitation as has ever been issued, and the hearer is faced with a choice. And the choice is not a momentary decision to be forgiven and to go to heaven. The choice is a choice that has eternal implications, and lifelong ones as well.

The choice is pretty simple. Two gates. One is wide and one is narrow. Two roads. One is broad and one is narrow. Two destinations. One is life, the other is destruction. Two crowds. One is many, and the other is few. Later on in this text Jesus speaks of two trees, one with fruit and one without; two builders, one whose building collapses, the other whose building stands; and two foundations, one of sand and one of rock. Everything in this passage puts the hearer at the crossroads. You go one of two ways, and there are only two ways to go. And Jesus tells you which way to go, "Enter by the narrow gate." This is a command. This is imperative. This is urgent. Go through that gate.

I think there are a lot of people who stand and admire the gate. Well, you say, what is the gate? Well it's not what is the gate, it's who is the gate? If you want to get on the road to eternal life, there's only one gate, and that gate is whom? Jesus Christ. That's why in John 10:9 He said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me he shall be saved." John 14:6. "I am the way, no man comes to the Father but by Me." "There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5. "There's no other name under heaven where men can be saved except Jesus." Acts 4:12. This is the gate that is Christ, and this is the only gate that leads to life.

You say, "Well, John, aren't there a lot of other gates? Aren't there as many gates as there are religions?" No, there's only one other gate. There's a gate that leads to heaven, and there's a gate that leads to hell. The gate that leads to hell says "heaven." It doesn't get there. It's a lie and a deception. There are only two gates. You either go the way of Christ, or you go the other way. You either go the way of Christ, which is by grace through faith in Christ alone, or you go some other way. It's not talking about comparing Christianity, or comparing religion with paganism. It's talking about comparing Christianity with every other religion. There are only two religions in the world, just two. There is the religion of grace alone which saves, and the religion of works, which damns. Only two ways.

Only through Christ do you go to life. Only through Christ. There's no salvation in any other than Christ. God saves those who put their trust in Christ by grace alone because of the work of Christ on the cross and in the resurrection. Every other religion is a broad road leading to destruction. I don't care what the name of the religion is or what the particulars of the religion, they're all the same. They're all some kind of works system, some kind of human achievement as opposed to divine accomplishment, which is true in the Christian faith. Whether that human achievement is some ceremonial, sacramental works system connected to Christianity, or whether it's some pagan religion like Hinduism or any other thing, anything that imposes works, ceremonies, religious duties, moral accomplishments as a necessity for salvation is part of the broad road.

It has many names and they all say it goes to heaven, but they lie, it goes to hell. Anything other than Christianity takes you to hell. And you can't get on the road to heaven unless you go through the gate, and the gate is whom? Jesus Christ. There isn't any other way. If you want to go to heaven, there's one gate.

Now it also notes for us that many enter the broad road through the broad or wide gate and they end up in destruction. That's a word describing hell, eternal punishment. So the Lord says enter by the narrow gate. And the term here describes a gate, commentators say, that is extremely small. It's one of those kind that it's very difficult to get through. You can't take anything. You go through one at a time. People don't come to the Lord and come into the kingdom of God in mass, one at a time. And it's not easy to get through. You can carry nothing.

Luke 13 records that while Jesus was teaching in the villages, someone asked Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" Why would they ask the Lord that? Because that was the message He preached. There's just a few. It's hard to find, and it's very narrow, and it's hard to get through. And you can't get through at all if you don't drop everything worldly. His answer was this to the question "are there just a few who are being saved?" His answer was, "Strive to enter by the narrow door for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and won't be able." Isn't that an amazing statement?

People are going to find the narrow gate, the narrow door. They're going to want to enter, but they won't be able to enter. You, He says, strive. The Greek word is *agnizomai*, agonize. It implies an agonizing, personal, intense struggle. Same word is used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 to describe an athlete battling, struggling to win a victory. It's used in Colossians 4:12 of a man named Epaphras who was laboring fervently, even to the point of death. It's used in 1 Timothy 6:12 to describe a soldier who fights the good fight of faith. It's a word about battling and struggling. It's a word that contains violence in it.

Jesus is actually saying, "You need to come into My kingdom. You need to be on the road to heaven. But it's a violent, self denying experience to get through that gate." And Jesus even said that in Matthew 11:12. He said, "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force." You don't, as I said, roll out of bed and end up in the kingdom of God. It is a violent experience to get through that narrow gate. In fact, in Luke 16:16 Jesus said "the gospel of the kingdom is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it." Peter says in 1 Peter 4:18, "It is with difficulty that the righteous is saved."

Well, you would think the easiest thing possible is to be saved. All you have to do is just reach out and take this gift, or pray this prayer, or walk this aisle, repeat after me. That isn't what the Bible says. Peter was right. He knew what Jesus preached, and he said, "It is with difficulty that the righteous is saved." The person who is truly saved is saved with difficulty. Salvation is not easy. The gate is small. It's hard to find. And there's a certain violence in getting through it.

Jeremiah had this in mind in Jeremiah 29:13 when Jeremiah said, "You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart." He meant what he said. Not with part of your heart, not with half of your heart, not with a quarter of your heart, but when it matters more than anything so as to consume you. The kingdom is not for people who want Jesus to fix their life a little. The kingdom is not for people who want Jesus to bump them up the social scale. The kingdom is not for people who want to escape hell.

The kingdom is for people who want their life changed, who want to avoid hell, but who have come to the point where they are willing to go through a violent time of conviction, and self hatred - as we saw last time - and penitence, and brokenness, to the degree that they literally abandon everything for Christ. That's seeking with all your heart.

Why is it so hard to become a Christian? Let's go back to our text. It's hard because you have to deny yourself. That's what makes it hard. Self denial to the degree of cross bearing, to the degree of submissive obedience to Christ as Lord. That is hard. That goes against the grain of everything human. As I said earlier, everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - that's what dominates us.

Look at the world around you. What makes people do what they do? It all comes from inside of them. It's the desire to have all their passions fulfilled. It's the desire to have all their visions realized. They see a more beautiful this, or a more beautiful that, or a fancier this, or a fancier that, and they want it. They're driven by these passions and, of course, the third one, and the dominating one, is the longing for honor, acceptance, prestige, prominence, power, influence, affection, respect, pride. That's people's lives. That's the way they live. That is their world.

And that's why Jesus said if you could get all the world delivered to you on those terms, everything you lust for, everything you long for, everything you see, and everything you desire for your own self glory, if you had it all it would be a bad bargain if you lost your soul. That's why in verse 24 He says, "If you're going to save your life, you have to lose it. If you're going to lose your life, you're going to find it, you're going to save it. So you've got to give up everything you are." Literally, across the grain of everything you are. That's the violent part of it.

Now the rich young ruler got up to the gate, saw the gate, spoke to the gate, "What do I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus told him. He said, "Too narrow for me," took his money bags and split, took his self righteousness and split. He wanted what his money could buy. He wanted the desires of his heart fulfilled. He wanted the desire of his eyes fulfilled with his money. And he wasn't about to admit he was a sinner in order to keep his self righteous pride intact. So with all of that in hand, he turned and walked away into destruction.

He was on a religious road, but it was the broad one. It said "heaven." It went to hell. But he could get on that one easily with all his baggage. He could carry the whole world on it. Much more appealing. The broad way is easy, easy to get on, just join the religion, plenty of latitude, no limitations, no boundaries, tolerance for everybody.

But that's not the gospel that Jesus preached. Jesus said things that were so stark and narrow. He said in John chapter 6, "If you don't eat My flesh and drink My blood - " He wasn't talking about cannibalism. What He was saying is you've got to take Me in in total. You have to embrace everything about Me, and if you're not willing to do that, if you're not literally willing to make Me the singular food for your soul, you're not going to enter My kingdom. And John 6 says, "And many of His disciples walked no more with Him." They got to the gate, they saw the gate. "Too narrow. We're out of here." They went back on the broad road that led to hell, the road of Judaism, in their case. And then Jesus turned to the ones that stayed and said, "Will you also go away?" And Peter on behalf of them said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life." And what they said was, "We know You're the only way and we've gone through the narrow gate."

Turn to Luke 14 for a minute. In Luke 14:25 here's an incident in the life of Jesus which gives you good insight into His evangelistic technique. Great multitudes are going along with Him. He's got this

huge mass of humanity following Him everywhere. “He turned and said to them - ” now this is an important opportunity. What is He going to say to them? He’s going to turn and, in the vernacular, He’s going to share Himself with them. What’s He going to say? Listen to what He said. They’re all following. They’re all kind of physically following. Spiritually He says, “If anyone comes to Me - ” if you’re coming spiritually, “and doesn’t hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever doesn’t carry his own cross - ” that is a willingness to die “ - and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

What a strange message. What a way to send a crowd home. If you’re not willing to come to Me with such complete abandon, such total commitment that it might cost you your father, your mother, your wife, your children, your brothers, your sister, and your life, you’re not coming on My terms. What He means, of course, by that is you’re stepping away from their religion and it’s going to cost you that relationship. Many people know this, of course. You become a Christian, everybody else in your family who’s not a Christian is immediately alienated. It is especially severe if you happen to come out of a family like these people were in, steeped in the midst of historic Judaism, the price was high.

And so this is another way of Jesus saying it will cost you everything. And if you’re not willing to pay that price - although He may not require it - if you’re not willing to pay it, you’re not desperate enough. You don’t understand the narrowness. You’re coming through without the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, the baggage you’ve always carried. You’re coming through without holding on to all the relationships. You can’t drag everybody with you through the narrow gate. You come alone. You can’t even consider your life something to hold on to because the Lord may require that. This is a true invitation and it’s what it’s saying back in our text - go back to chapter 9 - in the words, “Let him deny himself.”

I really am convinced that most popular evangelism today lures people into deception. It promises a wonderful, comfortable plan for everybody’s life. It says nothing of a small gate, narrow way. Its subject is the love of God. There’s no mention of the wrath of God. It tends to see people as deprived rather than depraved. It’s full of compassion and understanding without a mention of sin and wrath and judgment. No summons to repentance, no warning of judgment, no call for brokenness, no expectation of a contrite heart, no desire for sorrow over sin. It just calls for a moment, a hasty decision, a few words, and then some promises of health and happiness and blessing.

That’s not what Jesus said. It is a crossroads and to become a Christian is violent because you want to hold onto yourself, and that’s why the Spirit of God has to come, as John tells us in his gospel, with immense conviction. The Spirit coming to convict you of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. And then a violent battle engages. It’s in that violence that some come to contrition and repentance, desperation, abandoning everything that they’ve held dear in the past, they embrace Christ at any cost.

Now Jesus puts some teeth into His message in the next verse, and we'll just stop at the next verse. Here is the force that He uses to endeavor to cause these people to make the right choice. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels."

Jesus identifies those who will not repent and those who will not believe as those who are ashamed. Those who are ashamed. Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, whoever doesn't like Me and My gospel, and you can't separate the two. A lot of people have stood back to admire Jesus but they hate the gospel. A lot of people who admire Jesus and admired the non-saving and non-biblical gospel that they have heard. But Jesus says, "If you're ashamed of - " that is, if you reject, if you despise, if you find unacceptable " - Me and My words, then I'm going to find you unacceptable. I'm going to find you shameful. I'm going to find you despised. If you think this gospel is foolish, I'm going to find you foolish."

In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus said similarly, "If you confess Me before men, I'll confess you before My Father who is in heaven. But if you deny Me before men, I'll deny you." It comes down to that. Are you willing to confess the Christ of the New Testament, who is the true Christ, and the gospel which He proclaimed, which is the true gospel? Are you not ashamed of that so that you will openly and publicly confess it? Or are you ashamed of Him and His words and consequently deny that He is who He says He is, or that His gospel is the true message? If you are a denier, if you are ashamed of Him, if the preaching of the cross is to you foolish, then you are among the perishing.

You may admire Jesus. You may say, "Lord, Lord, we did many wonderful works in Your name, we preached in Your name, we cast out demons in Your name." But you're going to hear, "Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity." Admiration is not enough. Saying that you appreciate Christ and you serve Christ is not enough. There are many like that, many, many. Matthew chapter 7 says, "Many will say - " Many on the broad road are those who have admired Jesus, but they didn't come through the narrow gate. They didn't come with a broken and a contrite heart. They didn't come crushed under the weight of the law of God with a penitent attitude, embracing their true condition as desperate, and damning, and crying out for salvation from the only source, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the 13th chapter of Luke, because I want you to see this is often the subject that Jesus addresses, He's passing in verse 22 from one city and village to another, and He's proceeding on His way. "And someone said to Him - " which we noted earlier, " - 'Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter by the narrow door for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 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." Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank in Your presence." ' ' " Maybe we were there when You fed the 5,000. " ' "You taught in our streets." ' ' " Maybe they were in

Capernaum or some other village. “ ‘And He will say, “I tell you, I do not know where you’re from; depart from Me all you evildoers.” ’ ” Admirers of Jesus, followers of Jesus, yes - yes, they fellowshiped with Him. They were there. They listened to Him teach in the street. He says, “Go away from Me, you evildoers.” “There will be weeping - ” verse 28 “ - gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves being cast out.” It’s going to be hard for you to take.

So, the Lord says, “If you don’t know Me on My terms, I don’t know you at all. If you haven’t come through the narrow gate of repentance, conviction over your own sin, and abandonment of self, with such desperation that you cry out for salvation, and righteousness, and heaven, whatever the cost, then you didn’t come through the narrow gate, and you were virtually ashamed of Jesus and His words, and you’ll find Him ashamed of you.” And when will that finally be manifest? That time of shame? He says in this verse, and it’s very specific. He says, “When He comes.” When He comes.

When a sinner dies today, they end up in hell immediately, immediately, in conscious punishment. You don’t have to wait for the return of Jesus Christ for that. But that is almost like being in prison before your sentence, until your trial. Somebody commits a crime, they’re caught in the crime, they’re put in prison, and they await the final adjudication and sentencing. When will that come? That will come when He comes in His glory. He will come for His church, but His glory will not be manifest in the earth. The church will just disappear in the rapture. Then will come a terrible time of tribulation and great tribulation, and then Jesus will come back in shining glory. He’ll come back.

And the description of His coming is given in very, very graphic language in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. When He comes at His Second Coming, He will come in His glory and also accompanied by the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels. It is expressed in 1:7. “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.” Jesus comes in His glory. The angels come in their glory, and perhaps the flaming fire also speaks of the Father, who was manifest many times in the Old Testament in the flame of fire that led Israel by night, that dwelled in the Holy Place, dwelt over the Holy Place, the fire that Moses saw and the children of Israel saw on Sinai represented God: A shining, magnificent, blazing fire of the presence of God.

Christ comes, the angels come, the glory of God is put on display. Matthew describes that. Matthew chapter 24, Jesus coming in glory. Matthew chapter 25, Jesus coming in glory. Even Matthew chapter 26 toward the end of the chapter, again Jesus coming in glory. And when He comes, verse 8 says, “He will dealing out retribution - ” punishment. That’s why we called this third point punishment “ - dealing out punishment to those who do not know God - ” They do not know God. Why do they not know God? “ - even those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If you don’t obey the gospel, you can’t know God, right? There isn’t any other way to be saved. And what’s going to happen is He’s going to deal out punishment. What is the punishment? Verse 9,

“These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction - ” that means they will eternally be undergoing a non-terminal destruction “ - away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” They will be sent away from God’s presence where there is eternal weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

So when Jesus comes in His glory to earth at the second coming, at the end of human history as we know it, the end of man’s day, there will be the destruction of the ungodly. And they will be sent away into eternal destruction. The Lord then sets up His millennial kingdom and at the end of the 1,000 years of the kingdom comes the actual final tribunal. Turn to Revelation chapter 20 and I will just have you take a brief look at that. Revelation chapter 20.

John, looking into that future at the end of the kingdom, this is the final event in the universe as we know it. “I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it.” The moment John sees this, it says, “From whose presence earth and heaven fled away.” That’s the uncreation of the universe. It just disappears. “And no place was found for it.” It goes out of existence, the entire universe. God will uncreate it faster than He created it. And then there are “the dead, great, small - ” that means significant, insignificant. They all are brought “before the throne, the books were opened - ” simply identifying the fact that God has a perfect accounting of everything in all our lives “ - and there was another book opened, the book of life - ” that’s the book in which those who are saved have their names written. “The dead were judged from the things written in the books, according to their deeds.” That’s tragic because their deeds are evil, all men. “The sea gave up the dead in it, death and Hades gave up the dead in them.” The dead literally come with a resurrected body prepared for eternal pain, and they’re brought before this great throne, “every one of *them* judged by their deeds,” because that’s all they can be judged by, and judged by your deeds you’re doomed. “And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The only way to escape the lake of fire is to have your name in the book of life. The name in the book of life doesn’t mean you didn’t have any deeds of sin, it means your deeds were covered and paid for by the sacrifice of Christ. So when Christ comes in His glory, when He comes in the glory of the Father and the holy angels - you can read about that also in Revelation 19, picturing Him riding out of heaven, as it were, on a great white horse coming to conquer and destroy - when He comes to deal with the ungodly to destroy them, to punish them with eternal punishment, to bring them before the final tribunal for their final sentencing, it is at that point that the Lord will manifest that He is ashamed of all those who were ashamed of Him and His gospel.

It’s a serious, frighteningly serious reality. And understanding what is at stake, what good is it, what benefit, what profit if you gain the whole world, fulfilling all the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, if you were to get it all, what would it matter when you lose your eternal soul? Far better to come through the narrow gate. And that’s why Jesus says, “If you want to be in heaven, if

you want to follow Me into the kingdom, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me.”

Father, this is the truth as You have presented it on the pages of Holy Scripture. And it calls each of us to examine our destiny. Where are we headed? Are we selfishly hugging life? Hugging the longings and desires of our own fallen hearts? Holding onto our own comforts, riches, opinions, achievements, morality? If we are, we are headed for destruction.

Help us, Lord, to be awakened by Your Holy Spirit, that we may see ourselves as nothing, as the worst of sinners, beggars, destitute, willing even to die knowing that if we see ourselves thus and embrace Christ, we will be a prince with God forever. And remind us only a fool struggles with such a choice. We would not be like those in Jeremiah’s day who forsook the fountain of living waters to use broken pots that held no water.

Give us the broken heart of true repentance and then fill us up with Your grace. We thank You for the clarity with which Your Word speaks, that there’s no need to misunderstand the gospel. May we be faithful in its proclamation as well. We thank You in Christ’s name. Amen.

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