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

Are Just a Few Being Saved? Part 1
Scripture: Luke 13:22-30
Code: 42-184

After a few weeks we now return to the gospel of Luke. The gospel of Luke, this wonderful record of the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ; Luke 13, Luke 13. Starting in verse 22 and going down to verse 30 is a very important section of the teaching of the Lord Jesus. But I couldn't get past verse 24. So I want to talk to you this morning about Luke 13, verse 22 through 24. Let me read it. Luke 13:22, "And He was passing through from one city and village to another teaching and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. And someone said to Him, 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.

I don't know how that affects you but that is a shocking statement. There are going to be many people who want to enter the kingdom of God, who want to be saved and they're not going to be able. Really a very shocking statement. He says, "Strive to enter by the narrow door." He makes it seem so difficult. So difficult, in fact, that many people are going to endeavor to do it and not be able.

That just goes against the grain of what all of us have exposed to pretty much. We hear the gospel presented in ways that make it seem very easy to be a Christian. Pray this prayer, say these words, it's a gift, just reach out and receive the gift. That's all it takes. It's really simple to be a Christian. It's really easy to be a Christian. Basic understanding, Jesus died for you and if you want your sins forgiven believe in Jesus, say these words. Jesus save me and you're in.

What's the striving about? What is this about wanting to enter and not being able to enter. This makes salvation seem very, very difficult. That's just contrary to everything we've experienced. We've grown up, some of us have, in evangelistic churches and we're pretty familiar with how we do evangelism. We're familiar with what's often called the invitation at the end of a sermon or the altar call. All of that brand new stuff really from the...well, from the 19th century. It all is the product of Charles Finney who was a lawyer turned preacher back on the east coast, primarily ministering in New York State. It was Finney who devised these mechanical means to get people saved and Finney believed that salvation was all of man. That it was all dependent upon the human will.

And so anything you could do to manipulate the human will you do. And so he created what was called the anxious bench which was up in the front where people would come and they would get down to the anxious bench and they would be given a prayer to pray and anything that could move them down that path, so you could even develop a sequence. Get them to do something that was

easy to do like raise your hand when everybody had their eyes closed and then move them to step two, get them to walk down the aisle when the music was playing. And another way to do that was, and it's still being done today, when you hold an evangelistic meeting and you want people to come forward, you get counselors or other people who are already Christians to start coming. They create a flow. People get caught up in the flow and down they come because you've made it easy for them and they get down to the altar or the anxious bench or whatever.

You keep singing and working on their emotions and when they get there you give them a prayer. You get them in a mass group. You see this all the time, and you say these words and after you've said these words, you're in. Or maybe more individually presented to people sometimes in a book or perhaps on a radio or television or whatever, pray this prayer, say these words, and you're saved. It's just that easy. Now we've been warned many times through the years here about easy believeism. We've been warned many times about cheap grace, shallow repentance. Scripture is very clear about that, but it's pretty much a dominating approach in the evangelical world in which we live.

It's not wrong to want people to come to Christ, not wrong to want people to embrace Christ. And it's not wrong to give an invitation. It's right to do that. That's what we're supposed to do. Jesus was always calling sinners to His kingdom. And the apostles went and preached the gospel and called people to come into the kingdom. And the whole New Testament tells us our mandate is to go into all the world and call people to salvation and the kingdom.

I mean, I'm glad that we understand that's the reason the church is here. This is our one great commission. This is our one mandate. This is our one enterprise to call people to salvation. People who've heard the gospel message understand the cross and the resurrection, understand the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, understand that they need to put their faith in Christ to be saved, to call them to do that, to invite them to do that is appropriate, it's necessary.

Jesus did it through His whole ministry. The apostle Paul said we need to beg people to be reconciled to God. But the question is, how do we frame that invitation? How do we frame it? Do we say to people this is a real deal. Just come down here and say this little simple prayer, pray these little words? And some of the presentations of this I've read don't even take up a paragraph. It's like four sentences. It's that simple. What is this about striving? What is this about seeking to enter and not being able?

Well, this then brings us to a very, very important portion of scripture. This is a very critical teaching of our Lord because from verse 24 down to verse 30, we learn how Jesus does it. And I will tell you this, He's the best evangelist. He's the supreme evangelist and whatever technique He used, whatever approach He used, whatever method He used, whatever way He used, whatever words He used, set the pattern for all the rest of us to follow. This is a milestone text. This is a pinnacle text. And as many, many texts in the gospel of Luke do, it starts with a question.

If you've been with us through Luke for all these many years, you know how many times Jesus has asked a question or how many time there's a question on somebody's mind, He reads their mind and then in answer to the question launches into some very important teaching. This is a critical way to teach. Obviously, any good teacher knows that you want to be answering the questions that people are asking, both those that are stated and those that are implied or those that are on their hearts and Jesus did that all the time and Luke makes wonderful note of that.

And so in this case, there's a very interesting question asked. Lord, are there just a few who are being saved? You see, whoever asked that question understands that the ministry's about salvation. He understands that Jesus was reaching out to save sinners. He was preaching the gospel of salvation. By the way, this is a perfect passage to show you that being saved and entering the kingdom are the same thing, because the question is, are there just a few being saved as Jesus answers it in verse 28 and 29, He talks about entering the kingdom of God.

And here in verse 24, He talks about a door into the kingdom and in verse 25, He talks about a door being shut to the kingdom. And verse 28 and 29 talks about whether people are shut out or included. So it's a question about salvation, answered with discussion of the kingdom. Therefore, we conclude that issue of being in the kingdom is simply salvation. And I've said that for years, though that's not always the way this has been interpreted. Clearly when Jesus was talking about the kingdom and calling people to enter the kingdom, He was calling them to salvation.

Let's go back and at least get the setting in verse 22. He was passing through, through Judea in this case, having ended His Galilean ministry many months earlier and starting in Chapter 9, verse 51, you remember, 9:51 was the turning point. It says, "It came about when the days were approaching for His ascension He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem; from 9:51 He moves out of Galilee and He heads for Jerusalem. Finally arrives in Chapter 19, verse 1. So from 9:51 to 19:1 He's ministering throughout Judea headed to Jerusalem. It's not a direct heading in terms of physical direction, but He's moving in and around and through and back and forth, crisscrossing the southern part of Israel, Judea, moving toward the time of His crucifixion.

Chapter 17 says He took a brief little side trip into the region of Samaria and Galilee. But predominantly He's going through all the towns and villages as it says in verse 22 in the area known as Judea the southern kingdom on the way to Jerusalem. Just a few months now until Jerusalem and His death and resurrection. Now notice in verse 22 as He goes passing through one city and another, village and another, always teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching. That's what His ministry was. That's what ministry is, because it's about disseminating truth. That's what it is. It's not about an experience. It's not about inducing a feeling. It's about understanding. We read that this morning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And we must get understanding.

You start out fearing God, that is having a right relationship to God of respect and worship. When you have wisdom, that is when you understand truth. Jesus was a truth teacher. That is the compelling character of ministry. It's about the truth. That's why I'm so rabid about the truth and about getting the truth right and interpreting scripture correctly and understanding that the meaning of the scripture is the scripture and if you don't have the meaning right, you don't have the scripture. It's about the truth.

It's not about an opinion. It's not about inducing a feeling. It's not about creating some kind of "spiritual experience." It's about the truth. Jesus was a teacher and preacher. And somebody said the difference between teaching and preaching is just the volume. When you're teaching you say it in a normal voice and when you preach, you crank it up. I think there's a little bit more than there than that, but there's not a huge difference. The content would be the same. In teaching it's a didactic approach. In preaching it's more of a proclamation.

But nonetheless, it was all about teaching. All His miracles and signs and wonders that He did were just to affirm that He was coming from God and was God and this was the evidence of His divine nature which then bears upon the validity of His teaching. But it was always about teaching. Proceeding on its way to Jerusalem, He is as always engaged in teaching. And of course, His message was always the same. It was about the kingdom of God, even after the resurrection. Forty days He spends before His ascension speaking to them about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. It's always about salvation. It's always about entering God's kingdom; being delivered from Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom. It's always about that. It's always about salvation. That's what always is the issue. Always.

That's the only message we have. As Christians that is our message. Jesus never had a political message. He never had a moral message. His message was always the same. God has a kingdom and you need to be in it, because if you're not in it, you're going to be sent to eternal hell. It's that simple. John preached the kingdom and repentance and faith, John the Baptist, the prophet, forerunner of Jesus. Jesus preached it, the apostles preached it, and it's always been the message of true Christian ministry.

The question “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”, understands that He's been talking about salvation, which is synonymous with entering the kingdom. Just a thought on the word salvation, when you ask people saved from what? You say saved. You say that in the vernacular. Take it out of the theological. If you said to somebody are you saved, they might say to you from what? What are you talking about? Saved from what? You mean, was I drowning? What do you mean saved? We think of it usually as drowning. Somebody who got saved was drowning or somebody got saved from a terrible dilemma. Or somebody was rescued from some disaster that might have taken their life except they were taken out and they were saved that way.

So when you're talking about being saved, it's very important to understand you're saved from what? And I only need to remind you that if you were to listen to what's being said today in the name of Christianity, it would seem that you're being saved from unfulfillment. Or you're being saved from dissatisfaction. You're being saved from poverty to prosperity. You're being saved from inadequate feelings about yourself. You're being saved from sort of purposeless living. That's not what you're saved from. To put it real simply what you're being saved from is God. You're being saved from God by God.

Just so we're clear on that. You say what do you mean? You're being saved from God the judge and handed over to God the Redeemer. Do you understand? You're being saved from God. You're being saved from God's wrath. It's not about how you feel in this life, it's about your eternity that we're talking here. This is about eternity. Are just a few really being rescued from divine judgment. Rescued from eternal damnation. That was the question. And it really is an important question. I can understand the question. It's very easy for me to understand the question.

I think it's an honest question. I don't think it's a mocking question. I don't think there's anything in the text to indicate anything other than a legitimate question from somebody who knew what it was to be saved. Probably a legitimate follower of Christ who was maybe on the fence and hadn't come all the way to true faith, but was actually following Jesus, listening, taking it in, understood. Understood a need to repent and put faith in Christ, confess Jesus as it says back in Chapter 12, verses 8 and 9. "Confess Him before men as Lord."

Somebody who knew and we don't know where, but we said this many times, but the disciples were a mixed group. There were some real believers, true believers and then there were a whole lot of onlookers who were at all points on the spectrum. And some were just curiosity seekers. That was the end of it. A very indifferent, some were enemies trying to find some reason to further accuse Him. Others were along the line of interest all the way up to very interested and perhaps near to faith, but it's to this kind of group that Jesus answers the question.

The question is are just a few being saved? And that question would be to me an obvious question, very obvious. If I was following Jesus, that question would come to my mind. I'll tell you why. Jesus' ministry now is nearly at its end after three years. For all intents and purposes, illness has been banished from Palestine from the land of Israel, top to bottom, side to side. Jesus has gone and healed people who were sick of every imaginable disease and raised dead people. Demons have been cast out. The compelling teaching of Jesus was unlike anything everybody...anybody had ever heard ever. Or ever knew anyone who had ever heard. He was such a compelling teacher that it would be beyond anything imaginable to listen to Him teach.

The absolute power and magnetism of His person would have made Him more attractive than any human being whoever walked on the earth. And so He drew massive crowds as Chapter 12, verse 1 tells us. The crowds numbered in the tens of thousands so that they were stepping on each other. So you have these massive crowds following Jesus. You have this tremendous display of miracle power. You have this display of casting out demons. You have the magnetic personality of Jesus. You have this compelling preaching and teaching with such power that it must have just literally grabbed their minds and gripped them with the truth.

But after all of this, the true believers is a small group. In fact, Jesus refers to them as a little flock; a little flock. And the fact of the matter is the authorities, the religious elite of the nation of Israel have wholesale rejected Jesus as being from Satan. I mean, that couldn't have been a more wrong-headed conclusion. How is this thing to be? The leaders have rejected Him, the people have bought into their lie that He's Satanic, as we saw back in Chapter 11 when He healed a dumb man and made Him able to speak and they said He did this by the power of Beelzebub the ruler of the demons.

So the popular view is that He's got supernatural power but it's from Satan, not God. And still that didn’t diminish the crowd. If anything, that raised even greater interest and greater fascination, because there was nothing like it ever in the lives of these people. This is reality. You talk about reality, this kind of experience, going out, watching Jesus heal people and cast out demons and raise dead people and speak the way He spoke, this is the one time in history experience of a generation of people.

And so the crowds are massive, but the real believers are few and it’s confusing. It's confusing against the backdrop of the person and power of Jesus. It's equally confusing against the backdrop of Messianic expectation, because the Jews believed when the Messiah came He would save the nation, not a handful of nobodies and have the elite of the nation completely reject Him and ultimately put Him to death.

The idea was that when the Messiah comes He's going to bring salvation and a kingdom and the whole nation is going to fall at the Messiah's feet. They're all going to be saved and redeemed and they're going to be made into the glorious kingdom, a reconstituted kingdom of David, the kingdom at its max. And not only that, but the nations of the world are going to come and the prophet of the Old Testament says there's going to be ten Gentiles hanging on the robe of every Jew. Just being brought to see the glory of Israel and the glory of the Messiah the way the Queen of Sheba wanted to come and see the glory of Solomon.

That wasn't happening. The Gentile world wasn't showing any interest in Jesus at all. Well, a few Gentiles here and there. But worse than that, Israel had rejected Him altogether and it was just this little group, this little small group. I mean, when it was all said and done and after His resurrection, He

went to Galilee to appear only 500 disciples were there. That's all? And in the upper room in Jerusalem, there were only 120. Now on the day of Pentecost there were 3,000 who believed and the church began to grow at that point, but that was after Jesus already left. And there just...there's not even a thousand people that can be mustered in the whole nation. And there were several million there.

So the question is a legitimate question and it's a question I think you could ask today. People do ask it today. Are there only a few who are really saved? What about all these religious people in the world? What about all these world religions? What about Roman Catholicism? Are these people saved or are they not saved? They're religious, they have all the trappings. Roman Catholicism is a re-invented Phariseeism with all the external trappings, all the outside hoopla.

What about it? But when you're looking for true believers, look I told you a few weeks ago according to the recent survey 82% or 81% of Americans say they're Christians. Only 9% say they have a biblical world view. Well, what is a Christian who doesn't have a biblical world view. What is that? I mean, you could ask the question today are only a few really saved? People keep speculating and I hear it all the time. You know we're praying that the gospel will reach the end of the world and the whole world will be saved. You particularly hear that in the media Christian "media."

There's some idea, you know, there's going to be this great sweeping of the gospel across the face of the earth and, you know, I get the same kind of things you do, probably more than you do in the mail, and they say, you know, a million people were saved over here and two million were saved over here and three million were saved over here. And I got one thing one time that said tens of millions of people are now in the kingdom because of this ministry. But it seems to me that when it comes down to who really knows the truth of the gospel, it's a pretty small group.

And this man who asked the question, asked a legitimate question. Let's look a little more at verse 23. "Someone," this is the unidentified inquisitor. And he probably was saying what a lot of people were thinking. I mean, I would be thinking this. I mean, what about it? Compared to the nation of Israel and the world, this seems like a pretty small group here. There's just a very small group who have any real saving interest in Jesus Christ in spite of His power and miracles and teaching. And you know, if you look at the Old Testament, you can understand why the Jews felt this way. In ancient Judaism it was widely believed that the whole nation would welcome the Messiah. That when...one of the arguments the Jews used that Jesus couldn't be the Messiah is because Israel didn't accept Him.

And the idea was that if Jesus was the Messiah, the whole nation would receive Him. And the whole nation was going to receive salvation. And the whole nation was going to be blessed. And the whole nation was going to receive the kingdom. And once Israel was established as the great leading nation of the world under the leadership of its Messiah, once Israel was redeemed, saved, set up, then all the world would flow in under Israel's influence. Prophets talked about that. Prophets talked about the

salvation of Israel. The Old Testament talked about the fact that Israel would become a kingdom and the Messiah would reign as the king and He would rule the world and He would use Israel to assist Him in world rule so that all nations would come under His rule mediated in a way through Israel.

And the nations would come to see the glory of the Messiah reigning on the Mount of Zion in the land of Israel. And prophets talked about the curse being removed, talked about the desert blooming like a rose, talked about all kinds of changes, physical changes in the world, talked about righteousness prevailing and peace prevailing. The prophets talked about an everlasting kingdom. And Isaiah unfolds a lot of that. A lot of that salvation talk and a lot of that kingdom talk including Gentile salvation you find in Isaiah.

I can't read all of it to you, but just a couple of suggestions. Read the 45th Chapter of Isaiah, for example, and you read things like this speaking about God. "Oh God of Israel, Savior, Israel has been saved by the Lord." Verse 17, this is the promise of Israel's salvation. Not some temporal salvation, but with an everlasting salvation to all eternity. God promises the salvation of the nation Israel. Unmistakably. Unmistakably, and He goes on to reiterate it. In fact, you can find it all through this part of Isaiah Chapter 56 and we could read a lot more, but I'm skipping some.

But Chapter 56, verse, well verse 7, well, let's go back to verse 6 because we pick up the nations here. "Also the foreigners who joined themselves to the Lord to minister to him and love the name of the Lord to be His servants. Everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath holds fast my covenant. Even those I will bring to my holy mountain, make the joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offering sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar. For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations."

For all the nations, so this again looks at the time of Israel's salvation and the time of world salvation, world worship of the great coming Messiah. In the 60th Chapter of Isaiah, just one more on this, verse 21, "Then all your people will be righteous. They will possess the land forever. The branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified. All your people will be righteous, the smallest one will become a clan, the least one a mighty nation." This is pretty grandee stuff. There are many other prophecies about the salvation of Israel and the salvation of the nations.

In fact, the scriptures were used by the rabbis to establish this reality so that they believe when the Messiah came it would be this great salvation of the nation Israel and then it would extend to the world. The only people who wouldn't get in on the salvation the Messiah would bring, the Rabbi said were those who denied resurrection. Which meant that they believed the Sadducees were outside salvation. Or denied the divine origin of the law. Or those who live for nothing but their flesh or those who were heretics or those who verbalize the name of God. Those who said Tetragrammaton Yahweh.

Those were the only exceptions to salvation. They really did have this illusion all the way along that when the Messiah came they would all be saved. Even though their form of religion was apostasy. And if they knew anything about their history, they should have known that salvation wasn't widespread in the past. It wasn't widespread in the past in the world. And when God destroyed the sinful world only eight people escaped divine judgment. Only eight people were righteous before God by faith, by grace; Noah's wife and their sons and wives. The rest of the world population numbering in the millions could be as high as eight or ten million were all catapulted into eternal judgment.

It was a few then. When God destroyed the cities of the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah there was only Lot. Only Lot, he was spared. In all their history they must have known it was always a small remnant. Isaiah was told by God it'll be a tenth. It'll be a seed, a holy seed. It'll be a stump. That's all. They knew the doctrine of the remnant. They knew their history of idolatry and iniquity and immorality and they knew that the true believing remnant of Israel was always very, very small. They knew that. The whole northern kingdom went into captivity and never came back. The southern kingdom was decimated by the attacks of the Babylonians taking them off into captivity.

They knew the judgment of God again and again and again and again. They knew that those true believers were always a small remnant. They should have looked at the ministry of Jesus and said wow, here we go with the remnant. But holding out the illusion of the fact that they were all righteous and they were all seeds of Abraham, children of Abraham, and by that they should inherit salvation automatically. They expected that if there was a true Messiah arriving, He would embrace them, give them national salvation, throw off the yoke of the Roman oppressor and begin to call the nations to bow to them.

They should have known even in the Old Testament though that salvation was never national. It was always individual, always individual. "Oh, everyone that thirsts come seek the Lord while He may be found." It was always an individual call. Salvation was always individual, always will be. But here they can see, these followers can see. Their Messianic expectation was one thing. The power of Jesus Christ in His teaching, in His miracles, and all of that was another, they could see this could be the Messiah, but it doesn't square with our Messianic expectations and so the question comes up and it's an obvious question. Are there just a few being saved?

It recognizes that some people are being saved. It just questions how many. And Jesus knew the statistical answer by the way. He knew the answer. He knows how many people are saved. He knows who's written in His book. He says, "I know my sheep." But the question is not relevant and He acknowledges that it's not relevant by ignoring it. People are always into numbers and statistics. That's still going on today. There's all kind of statistical approaches to missions these days. But numbers and statistics are irrelevant and the answer to the question that Jesus gives is so important. Look at the answer.

He said to them, and He broadens it from the inquisitor to them, which means that this man is asking a question that was on a lot of people's minds. People who had heard about message of salvation, but hadn't yet made the commitment. 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." Look, it doesn't matter how many. It only matters that you be one of them. Do you see? It doesn't...the number doesn't matter. You matter.

It's not really relevant to you what that number is, but it is relevant to you whether you're a part of it. He speaks to the inquisitor and everybody else like him who were wondering about this. People who had heard the truth, but had not confessed Jesus as Lord had not fully embraced the truth and He answers them with an invitation. So now we're in to how Jesus confronted people and welcomed them or invited them to His kingdom.

He doesn't say well, I'll tell you what, it's important that you be in the kingdom so pray this prayer. He doesn't say it's important that you be in the kingdom so just say these words. He doesn't say, you know what, just take the gift. Here's the gift, just say Jesus I want you forgiveness and I want to go to heaven and there it is. He doesn't say that. He gives this really strange answer. "Strive to enter by the narrow door for many I tell you will see to enter and will not be able." That's just shocking. That's shocking. He's saying you better get at this, because you might try and not make it.

Now, the Lord's invitation is from verse 24-30. And as we unfold that, I'm going to give you four words, exertion, desperation, relation, and perception. Those i-o-n words always kind of help us remember. Exertion, desperation, relation, and perception, we'll kind of use those as hooks to hang the flow on. Let's just look at the first one. When the Lord gives an invitation, He not only is interested in perception, relation, desperation, but first of all exertion. Exertion, in fact, spiritual exertion is demanded.

Do you want to be a Christian do you? Okay, "Strive to enter by the narrow door for many I tell you will seek to enter and will not be able." In an easy believeism approach of our modern evangelism, this seems almost heretical; almost heretical. The Lord is saying stop being concerned about the total number who are going to be saved and make sure you're one of them. Lord doesn't save anybody apart from human will. It's not apart from the will of the sinner. And He starts with an amazing analogy, "Strive to enter by the narrow door." The door to the kingdom is very narrow; it's very narrow. In fact, it's so narrow, it's hard to get through. It's not about take the free gift. It's not about passively receiving something.

The word strive, let me talk about it, agonisma. Agonisma, we get the word agonize from it. Pretty strong word, isn't it? When we say somebody is agonizing we would say they're in an intense struggle. But agonisma was a technical term for athletics. It was a technical term for competing and it

was used and is used in the New Testament in terms of competing hand to hand combat. It's the word for fight. It's to engage in a fight. In fact, it's not used except here in the Synoptics; that's Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This is the only it appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but it does appear in John's gospel, this very same word agonisma. And here's how it's translated. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight." It's the word for fight.

1 Timothy 6:12, it's fight. 2 Timothy 4:7, it's fight. You're talking here about a serious competition. It's 1 Corinthians 9:27, it's used by the apostle Paul. That's a very familiar passage, 1 Corinthians 9:25. "Everyone who fights in the game is exercised as self-control in all things." And He says, you know, I don't beat the air. I strike my body. He's talking about a boxing match. We're talking about...you're talking about trying to get in to a narrow door and you have to fight your way through. Isn't that an amazing imagery? You have to fight your way through.

You say well, what in the world is this? What is this fight? What is this intense struggle? I was talking to somebody the other day in the studios when I was getting ready to be on the CNN and a very nice person said "well, you know, I appreciate what you say and I just want you to know that I just really know how important it is to be connected to God. It's just really important to connected to God. It's so great." It's just this sort of cool thing to be connected to God. There's no understanding of the biblical approach to what it really means to know God.

It's a fight. It's a striving. About what? What are we fighting about here? We go right back to that critical passage in the 9th Chapter of Luke and verse 23 where Jesus explains exactly what it's about. Verse 23, Luke 9, "If anyone wishes to come after me," so you want to come into my kingdom do you? You want to be saved, "let him deny himself." That's it. It's not about self-fulfillment. It's about self-denial. It's the end of you. And then take up His cross be willing to die if need be, daily. In other words, you so desperately want to enter the kingdom of God and be saved from your sin and receive eternal life, that you are willing to die physically every day because this gift is so surpassing.

And then follow me. And He says this, "For whoever wishes to save His life shall lose it." You try to hold on to your life the way you want to live it. You'll lose it. Here's where the battle lies. The battle is between you and Christ. If you lose, you win. If you win, you lose. You save your life, you lose it. You lose your life, you save it. What's the point he says if you gain the whole world and you forfeit your life, your soul.

This is the battle. The battle is in you. The battle is repentance, legitimate honest self-denial. To the point, not where I want Jesus to fix my life. I want Jesus to fulfill my dreams. I want Jesus to do for me what I want to do and that's what the popular Christianity is today is guess what? Whatever you want to be, whatever you want to do, whatever you want to become, guess what? God wants you to become that. That'll sell. Just hook up to God and you'll fulfill all your dreams. It's not about that. It's

about the end of you and the end of your dreams and ambitions and desires and longings. It's a stunning statement, stunning. You give up your life. You give up your dreams. You give up your goals. You give your desires. He could cost you your family. He brings a sword between people in your family. You might have to give up all your possessions, who knows. You have to willing to hate yourself. You have to be willing to hate everything around you in this kind of repentance.

Chapter 9, verse 57, somebody said to Him, "I'll follow you wherever you go." Jesus said, "I don't think you'll like where I'm g oing. Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head." I don't think you want to go where I'm going, because I'm not going where you want to go. He was saying, I'll follow you wherever you go if you're the Messiah, because I know where you're going to end up and I want to be there when you get to the palace.

Jesus' saying, that's not where I'm going. He said to another, "Follow me." He said, "I need to go bury my father." His father wasn't even dead. I want to go home and get the inheritance, because if you don't have anywhere to go, I've got to have my own cash. John 12:24-25, Jesus said, "Hate yourself." Hate yourself. There's the battle, the struggle is to let go of you. If you win, you lose. If you lose, you win forever. Struggle is further indicated not only by the word agonisma, but it's further indicated by the narrowness of the door. This is a narrow door.

That is used here and in Matthew 7:13-14, you know the passage. Very familiar in the Sermon on the Mount. We've looked at it many, many times, but it's such a critical text. Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide the way is broad that leads to destruction. Many are those who enter it. The gate is narrow, the way is narrow that leads to the life. Few are those who find it." It's a narrow door. It's hard to find. There are so many voices. There's so much confusion. There's so much chaos. There's so much deception, so much false Christianity all over the place that it's hard to find the true door. And once you find the true door, listen to this, once you've actually found the true gospel, once you've gotten rid of all the garbage that surrounds Christianity because that's Satan's ploy disguising himself as an angel of light, falsifying Christianity is his primary enterprise. It's his primary enterprise.

And once you've been able to see your way through all that and you've come to see the truth, then the fight really begins because then the true gospel calls for self-denial, self-denial, it's not easy. It's easy to get on the broad road. It says heaven, but it goes to hell. Nobody sells hell, everybody sells heaven. That's just not the way to get there. Now listen to what John the Baptist said. Go back to Luke 3 for a moment, Luke 3.

John the Baptist preaching and he's quoting from Isaiah 40 verse 3 and 4. And he comes along preaching repentance. There's no forgiveness of sin apart from repentance. Baptism was the way to demonstrate outwardly that inward repentance. And so he says, "Look here's what Isaiah said," verse 4, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," this is the message of the prophet, this is the message of the evangelist, this is the message I preach whoever's crying out to people make ready the way of

the Lord." We're not talking about a physical trail here, we're talking about the heart. How do you get your heart ready. You have to make the path straight. Every ravine has to be filled up. Every mountain and hill has to be brought low. Every crooked place has to become straight and every road has to become smooth and then all flesh will see the salvation of God.

You want salvation? Then you've got some things to do. Then there's a work to be done in your heart. The ravine is the low place and it speaks metaphorically of the dark things of the heart. They have to be brought up and brought to light. Have to deal honestly with the deep dark sinful secrets of the heart. The high places, that's all the stuff of pride, self-will, self-glory has to be brought down. The crooked is the twisted things that need to be dealt with and honestly confessed. And the rough all the other garbage that clutters your life, you come if you want a highway on which the Messiah walks into your heart and brings you salvation. This is what has to be done. The sinner's heart has to be ready under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The sinner's will is broken and you become that broken and contrite heart.

The Lord comes to a heart prepared by repentance. That's why we're going to talk about repentance tonight. Only that person will see the glory of God in salvation. And you see, that's why He can say many will see to enter and will not be able. That is a very strong statement, but the point is this, there are a whole lot of people who superficially want to connect with Jesus. And when Jesus is somewhere around in their life helping them down the path that they have chosen. And that's not it. Every false kind of Christianity is this kind of feeble attempt to enter and not be able.

Every person who believes a superficial gospel, a surfeited gospel, a false gospel and modern evangelism unfortunately produces these kinds of people and then convinces them that they're really saved. It's frightening. One of my heroes is A. W. Pink, Arthur W. Pink. He's been with the Lord for a while, but as a young Christian I read an awful lot about Arthur Pink. I just finished reading a new biography on Arthur Pink and very sad, made me cry at the end. My heart was really broken just think about what the man went through.

He was just a very gifted, faithful student of the word of God. Very powerful insights in the scripture. This is what he wrote in 1937, okay. 1937, okay, this was before I was born at the heyday of his ministry. Listen to what he wrote. "The terms of Christ's salvation are erroneously stated by the present day evangelists. With very rare exceptions, he tells his hearers that salvation is by grace and is received as a free gift. That Christ has done everything for the sinner and nothing remains but for him to believe, to trust in the infinite merits of his blood. And so widely does this conception now prevail in orthodox circles, so frequently has it been dinned in their ears, so deeply has it taken root in their minds that for one to now challenge and denounce it as being so inadequate and one-sided as to be deceptive and erroneous, is for him to constantly court the stigma of being a heretic and to be charged with dishonoring the finished work of Christ by inculcating salvation by works."

When I wrote the book of Gospel According to Jesus, I was accused of teaching salvation by works. I was called a heretic for affirming the standard of repentance and faith that New Testament affirms. And I was reminded that Pink went through the same thing in his generation. He goes on to say, "Salvation is by grace, by grace alone. Nevertheless, divine grace is not exercised at the expense of holiness. It never compromises with sin. It is also true that salvation is a free gift, but an empty hand must receive it and not a hand which still tightly grasps the world. Something more than believing is necessary to salvation. A heart that is steeled in rebellion against God cannot savingly believe. It must first be broken. Only those who are spiritually blind would declare that Christ will save any who despises authority and refuse his yoke. Those preachers who tell sinners that they may be saved without forsaking their idols, without repenting, without surrendering to the lordship of Christ are as erroneous and dangerous as others who insist that salvation is by works and that heaven must be earned by our own efforts."

That servant of God spent the last 12 years of his life in obscurity up on the coast of Scotland and for 12 years was never given an invitation to speak any place. Though he had ministered all over the world. Nobody wanted that message. And false evangelism leaves people skeptical of true evangelism. False evangelism leaves people skeptical of true evangelism. And therefore more open to further deception. True evangelism is not at all ambiguous as it would appear today. It's clear. And the call that Jesus gives is this, you better strive. You better go to battle with your own will and your own pride and your own lusts. And if you win, you lose, but if you lose, you win. This is the broken and the contrite heart. And James reminds us "God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble."

Yes, salvation is the work of God, but not apart from the human will. That's why Philippians 2 says, "Work out your salvation for it is God who works in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure." So the first thing the Lord puts in this invitation is spiritual exertion. Next time we're going to talk about desperation. Let's bow in prayer

Father, we come to You now at the end of this wonderful time of worship and learning Your word, we worship You for it. It defines who You are. We thank You that You've called us to this gospel to this salvation. We thank You that You've called us to proclaim this. I pray for those that are here today who perhaps have some illusion about some simplistic approach to You that is going to be clearly putting them in the category of those who wanted to enter, but weren't able. The world is full of people who want to escape hell. They want to go to heaven. They want You, but on their terms or on some convoluted terms that have been told to them. Lord, I just pray that the truth would prevail. Oh Lord how we need the truth to prevail.

First of all, in every heart here and then in Your church so that You can be honored, You the God of all truth. Your Son is the truth whose word is true. And work that truth into the hearts of all of us for salvation and sanctification. Father we do commit this truth to You, work it mightily in every heart. We

pray for Your glory, Amen.

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