



Not Our Ways: Few Are Saved

Luke 13:22-30

1. A Command (verse 24a)
2. Four Warnings (verses 24b-28)
3. Another Perspective (verses 29-30)

In the ancient world, it was thought that one's health was based upon having the proper balance of four basic body fluids (often called humors): blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. If one of these fluids was out of balance with another it was thought that the way back to health was to restore the balance. This could be done various ways. If you starved yourself some of those fluids in your body would naturally be eliminated from your system in the course of time possibly restoring the necessary balance. If you vomited some of the fluids inside you would come out as well. If you were bleeding of course you were losing fluid which may be an aid to health. When all four body fluids were in balance again your health was restored.

As people believed these things it was only logical for doctors to engage in the practice of bloodletting--the intentional draining of blood from your body. Historically this practice goes way back. Hippocrates, "the father of Medicine," who lived in the 5th century B. C. is known to have practiced it. Not until the 16th century was the practice questioned in any way. Surprisingly bloodletting was regularly practiced up until the late 19th century. In fact even George Washington, our first president, was treated with this technique by his physicians. He died in 1799 of a throat infection. However this was only shortly after he had a horseback riding accident and was treated by doctors who removed almost four pounds of blood (1.7 liters) from his body (nearly a third of the blood that was within him).

Even after George Washington died the practice continued on for almost another hundred years or so. In 1844 Joseph Pancoast wrote *A Treatise on Operative Surgery*. In his treatise he justified the practice of bloodletting with the following words: "The opening of the superficial vessels for the purpose of extracting blood constitutes one of the most common operations of the practitioner. The principal results, which we effect by it, are ... 1st. The diminution of the mass of the blood, by which the overloaded capillary or larger vessels of some affected part may be relieved; 2. The modification of the force and frequency of the heart's action; 3. A change in the composition of the blood, rendering it less stimulating; the proportion of serum becoming increased after bleeding, in consequence of its being reproduced with greater facility than the other elements of the blood; 4. The production of syncope, for the purpose of effecting a sudden general relaxation of the system; and, 5. The derivation, or drawing as it is alleged, of the force of the circulation from some of the internal organs, towards the open outlet of the superficial vessel. These indications may be fulfilled by opening either a vein or an artery." [\[1\]](#)

Bloodletting may have seemed perfectly logical to the people of generations past but today, of course, it makes no sense to us at all. The reason why it makes no sense is that we have a different perspective on the matter. We see things differently now than people who lived a few hundred years ago saw them. So it is with God. He has a different vantage point than we have. What might seem to make perfect sense in our mind isn't the perspective that God has. What may make no sense to us makes all the sense to Him because His ways are not our ways. Perhaps in eternity God will allow us to know some of the mysteries of why He created the world in the manner in which He did. However for now we are simply called to trust Him even if everything doesn't fully make sense to us.

We are currently in a topical sermon series entitled "Not Our Ways." For the past five weeks we have taken different topics that have demonstrated how God's ways aren't our ways. I have taken these topics from a sermon written by Edward Payson, entitled, "God's Ways Above Men's." In the heart of his sermon he outlined eight different ways in which God has created and governed this world differently than we would have done if we were God and we had the opportunity to create a world.

We now land on the sixth illustration that Payson used. Here's what he said, ... "6. A wide difference between God's thoughts and ways, and our own, appears, when we consider the manner in which he dispenses the benefits which Christ has purchased, and the character and situation of those whom he chooses to make wise unto salvation. We should expect that if such a Savior were provided, all would be saved; and that if for any reasons, this were impossible, the most noble, wise, rich and learned, or at least, the most moral and amiable would always be called. But this we see is not the case. It is evident from scripture, if any thing can be, that all will not be saved, and it is also evident from observation, so far as we can see; for we find that multitudes appear to live and die without any spiritual knowledge of the Savior, or preparation for heaven. We also find, both from scripture and observation, that it is not always the most wealthy, wise, or learned, nor even the most moral and amiable, who are called to embrace the gospel. Christ told the moral, but self-righteous Pharisees, that the publicans and harlots would go into the kingdom of God before them. Hath not God, says St. James, chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? Ministers and private Christians very often find reason to acknowledge that God's thoughts and ways are not like theirs; for he rarely converts such, as they think the most probable subjects of conversion; and while they are watching such persons, and daily hoping and expecting to see them embrace the truth, others, of whom perhaps they never thought, start up and seize the prize." [\[2\]](#)

This current message is entitled "Not Our Ways: Few Will Be Saved." Had we created a world in which creatures were in need of salvation I would suspect that most of us would create a world in which all would be saved. On the other hand perhaps only a small number of people would be excluded from heaven but such isn't the world that God created. God created a world in which there are few that will be saved.

Recently, I was talking with someone about my series of sermons and about how this week I would be preaching on how there will only be a few who will be saved and many who will be damned. His response was so good. He said, "I wish it were the other way around. I wish that many were saved and only a few damned." That's such a good heart to have. It's a heart for the lost who are perishing in their sins. Oh, that God would save many! Yet the reality of the Biblical text is that there are only a few that are saved. This may not reflect our ways but it is God's way.

One of the best texts in which this is taught clearly comes in Luke 13:22-30, which is our text for this morning.

Luke 13:22-30

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 through 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, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out. And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

In this text we see Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. In the context of Luke's gospel this has been the case ever since chapter 9, verse 51 where we find out that Jesus "was determined to go to Jerusalem." It is there that He will face the wrath of God upon the cross at Calvary. As He was on his way up He was traveling from village to village. As He was passing through these cities Jesus was doing what He always was doing. He was healing the sick and He was casting out demons and He was preaching.

On this particular occasion someone came up to him asking a question (in verse 23). In the rest of the passage Jesus answers the question. The question comes in verse 23, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" (verse 23).

I believe that whoever it was who asked this question was very perceptive. He was observing the ministry of Jesus. He was listening to what Jesus was saying, and watching what He was doing. He came to the conclusion that there weren't many people who were coming to Jesus and being received well by Him. Certainly there were crowds who were loosely following Jesus but there were only a few who were really committed to follow Jesus no matter what. There were many who were on the edge of the pool, lightly dipping their toes into the pool, but very few were taking a swim, as Jesus was calling them to do.

In fact when Jesus was approached He often challenged the one coming to Him so as to make following Him more difficult. In Luke, chapter 9, we see three such examples of this.

Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow You wherever You go" (Luke 9:57). Rather than saying, "Well, then, come along!" Jesus said, "The foxes have holes the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (verse 58). This was a call to see if he was really up to the challenge. "You say you want to follow Me. Let me tell you what it's going to be like. We will go and go and go and have no rest at all. Are you still willing? The way will be hard!. You will get tired! You will need to be on the alert constantly! Are you still willing?"

In verse 59 Jesus met up with another potential follower. He was willing to come but wanted to delay it a bit wanting to bury his father first. Jesus said, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God" (verse 60). In other words Jesus said, "Don't delay in following Me. If you want to follow Me you need to come now or never." Jesus wasn't demonstrating too much patience with this individual.

When a third man came to Jesus simply requesting to go home and say "Goodbye" to his family Jesus had little tolerance for Him either. Jesus said (in verse 62), "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In other words, Jesus said, "You can't go back. You need to follow me now." Jesus was hardly bending in any way to produce more converts. If anything Jesus seemed to be insuring that his followers were few in number, not many, because of His high demands.

When crowds were increasing Jesus would often give an "audience reduction" type of sermon. Consider the following text:

Luke 11:29-32

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

As the crowds were increasing Jesus increased His condemnation of the generation of His day. The implication of these words is that the crowds that Jesus was addressing weren't repenting!

Later in the chapter Jesus was asked by the Pharisees to come and have lunch with him (verse 37). Jesus did so and then proceeded to denounce the Pharisees for doing so.

Luke 11:39-44

But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

This past week my father attended a fund-raising banquet for a local state representative. Now suppose that during the meal he stood up and denounced all of the governmental officials for their incompetence and inability to run our nation well. Suppose he went on and on for several minutes talking about the corruption scandals and the failed legislation in the past as well as the many failed projects.

This wouldn't win him any favors in the political world. But that's exactly what Jesus did. He was invited to have lunch with a Pharisee. At this lunch Jesus strongly offended him cursing him in no uncertain terms for his hypocrisy. And Jesus was loud enough for others to overhear what He was saying. For, in verse 45, we find out that "One of the lawyers said to Him, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." How does Jesus respond? "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them" (Luke 11:45-47).

Jesus wasn't trying to win friends and influence people. He was putting forth the truth of God in very challenging ways, offending and insulting people along the way. It might be argued that Jesus was playing toward the crowds, as he was denouncing the hypocritical leaders. After doing so, we read, ... "Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another" (Luke 12:1). People love a revolutionary. But, look what Jesus said to the crowds.

Luke 12:54-56

And He was also saying to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out that way. You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?"

Sure, there were crowds who were following Jesus. But Jesus, Himself, indicates that they were unable to discern the times. They were unable to discern who was standing before them. Jesus called them "hypocrites" (verse 56). Then, He proceeded to tell them that they were unable to discern the times! The implication is that they failed to respond to Jesus in the manner in which Jesus had required of them. They preferred to stay on the edge, and Jesus was telling them that the edge isn't good enough. Rather, they needed to repent, and bring forth fruit from that repentance.

At the beginning of Luke 13, Jesus called them to repentance. Jesus had just finished calling the crowds "hypocrites" (Luke 12:56). Some were present who reported to them an incident in which Pilate had some people killed near the temple. Jesus used the opportunity, not to express a political commentary on the situation. Rather, Jesus said (in 13:3), "I tell you ... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." He repeats it again in verse 5, "I tell you, ... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

In saying these things, Jesus was telling the crowds that they were in danger of perishing in their sins. They needed to repent. They needed to bring forth fruit from that repentance. In verses 6-9, Jesus told them a parable that illustrated the need for fruit.

Luke 13:6-9

A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, "Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?" And he answered and said to him, "Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down."

The application of this parable isn't too difficult to figure out. For several years, Jesus had been among the Jews preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And yet, the Jews had failed to repent. They had failed to bring forth fruit from that repentance. Jesus was saying that the time was short. Soon, they would be cut down if they didn't respond.

Quite frankly, few ever responded to the call of Jesus. To be sure, there were crowds who followed Him. But, very few stepped forward to be identified with Jesus. The death of Jesus is a great illustration of this. As He entered Jerusalem, many were singing His praises. But, few were willing to identify with Him in His death. Only a few women dared to be with Jesus during this difficult time. After His death, the eleven disciples were afraid even to show their face publicly.

And so, getting back to this unknown person in Luke 13:23, who asked the question, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" It's a good question. It's an insightful question. I believe that this man had correctly discerned the ministry of Jesus. Sure, the crowds were attracted to Him. But, of the crowds that followed Him, very few were entering into true discipleship. Far from making it easy for disciples to come and follow Jesus, He was making it harder for them. This man wanted some clarification, "Was it only a few who are being saved?"

If you spend any bit of time thinking about this, you would realize that it wouldn't have taken a Jew at the time of Jesus to observe the ministry of Jesus to ask this question. Any Jew who knew the Scriptures could have asked this question, if they really thought about the

history of the Bible. It's no great secret that in the history of the world, there have only been a few who were saved.

Think about the days of Noah. We can only guess the number of people who were on the earth in his days. But, based upon the genealogical numbers, we could easily guess that there were millions. And yet, when the Lord looked down upon the earth, He saw that the "wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Everyone was evil! Everyone was evil to a great degree. And so, God determined to destroy the world, bringing a great flood upon the earth. But, He did save some. How many did He save? He saved eight people: Mr. and Mrs. Noah, along with their three sons and their wives. Is that many people who were saved, or a few?

How about during the days of Abraham. Abraham's nephew Lot had found himself in trouble in Sodom. It was revealed to Abraham that God was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins. Abraham protested, saying, "Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will You indeed sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who are in it?" (Gen. 18:23-24). And God said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account" (Gen. 18:26). Then, Abraham pleaded with God to spare the city if there were 45 righteous people in the city (Gen. 18:28). God agreed, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there" (Gen. 18:28). Through a series of lowering the number, eventually, God agreed with Abraham to cease from destroying the city if there were 10 righteous people found in the city.

Did the city survive? Not hardly. "The LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven ... [and] God destroyed the cities of the valley" (Gen. 19:24, 29). The obvious conclusion is that there were less than 10 righteous people in Sodom. Now, how big was Sodom? We have no idea. The city was destroyed by the LORD and we have no evidence of its size. It may have been a small city, perhaps even as small as a hundred? Perhaps there were 10,000? We don't know. But, even if it were as small as a hundred, the number of righteous people in the city can easily be identified as being the "few."

Let's continue on in Biblical history. Consider those who came out of Egypt in the time of the Exodus. There were about two million in the land at the time. Of the ten spies that went to spy out the land, only two of the ten trusted God. The rest of the people followed after the ten unbelieving spies. And so, God saw fit to see an entire generation destroyed in the wilderness. Paul comments on this generation. He said, "with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:5). In other words, God was only pleased with a few. There were only a few who were saved. Precisely, there were only two: Joshua and Caleb.

Consider the book of Judges. You can't read through that book without getting a sense of the great wickedness of God's chosen people. They were in the land of Canaan, being influenced by the godless society all around them. Every generation (or so,) a righteous judge would arise to deliver the people from their bondage. When the judge died, Israel was worse than before. By the end of Judges, the categorical statement comes, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Even when Israel had a king, things weren't much better. Most of the kings were wicked. There were only eight righteous kings (out of about forty or so). The people willingly followed after them. A simple, cursory reading of the prophets will reveal the same thing. Among the people of the Israel, there are only a few righteous people. In fact, Isaiah was commissioned to a fruitless ministry (Isaiah 6). God told Him to "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim" (Is. 6:10). Isaiah was to preach "until cities are devastated and without inhabitant." These things speak of few being saved, not many.

Shortly after Elijah had defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he was depressed by the cave, lamenting to the Lord, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; And they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:14). The LORD responded, "I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). On the one hand, it might be encouraging. 7,000 is a bunch of people! And yet, when you realize that Israel may well have had several million people. 7,000 is few by comparison. It is less than one percent of the population.

As you continue to think about the number of people who are saved, it only gets worse, when you realize that these sorts of numbers are dealing with the small nation of Israel, where there is a godly remnant. The number of people throughout the world during these times made Israel seem like a small country. And only a few from a small country were saved!? That's the way the Bible speaks. It's always the few who are saved.

And yet, we can easily think differently. I want you to think about the funerals that you have been to. How many of them have spoke of the person as perishing in hell for eternity? Not too many. It's because many in our world have a faulty theology that believe that most are saved, and few are damned. It's only the really bad that are damned!

J. C. Ryle says it very well, "The Bible and the men of the world speak very differently about the number of the saved. According to the Bible, few will be saved: according to the men of the world, many. According to the men of the world few are going to hell: according to the Bible few are going to heaven. According to the men of the world salvation is an easy business: according to the Bible the way is narrow and the gate is strait. According to the men of the world few will be found at last seeking admission into heaven when too late: according to the Bible many will be in that sad condition, and will cry in vain, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.'" [\[3\]](#)

In Matthew, chapter 7, this is what Jesus affirmed. He said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14). There is a broad way, which many find. But, this way leads to destruction. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). The broad way is the natural way. It's the way that many find. But, Jesus said, "the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:14).

In my son's room, my wife and I have put a poster on the wall. This poster is a representation of the two paths of life which we can travel. The one is a broad path that ultimately leads to a fiery destruction. The other is a narrow, windy path that ultimately leads to heaven. Throughout

this poster, there are people along the two paths with many Bible verses describing what's taking place. This poster contains the things that we need to keep ever before our minds. When I asked my son how often he looks at it, he says, "Dad, I look at it every day!" [\[4\]](#)

"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" (Luke 13:23). Yes. There are only a few who are being saved.

Well, let's look at how Jesus answers the question posed to Him in this context.

Jesus answer the question with (1) a command, (2) some warnings and (3) another perspective.

1. A Command (verse 24)

The command comes in verse 24, Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." The first thing that Jesus says is this: "Don't worry about the number of people entering the kingdom. Worry about yourself! Strive to enter the kingdom yourself!"

There are many who concern themselves with the salvation of the African savage who has never heard the gospel. But, at the same time, they are not concerned about themselves.

In this case, perhaps Jesus discerned that this man was all concerned about the number of people in the kingdom, concerned that it would be few and not many. But Jesus instructs this one to be concerned for his own soul. The application comes rightly to all of us: Strive to enter through the narrow door.

Perhaps today has found you in the same situation. You hear of the many who are lost, who you think are lost without a reason! It may just be that your concerns for others need to be turned to yourself. You have heard the gospel! You have heard of the work of Christ on behalf of sinners. Are you striving to enter the narrow door?

The way of salvation is tight and restricted. There is only one way of salvation. It is through the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 10:9, Jesus said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved." The implication is clear: if you don't enter through the door of Jesus, you won't be saved. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). And the door through which Jesus calls people is a difficult door.

Here in Luke, we have already seen how difficult Jesus made it to enter. We have seen Jesus challenge those who expressed a desire to follow Him with a greater commitment than even they expected (Luke 9:57-62). When the crowds were at their height, Jesus called them a wicked generation (Luke 11:29). Jesus strongly denounced the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Luke 11:37-52). We can look forward to other chapters in Luke and see exactly how hard Jesus made entrance in His kingdom to be. Consider what Jesus said in Luke 14.

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not 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 does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

Let that sink in. Jesus said (in verse 26), "If you want to be My disciple, you must give up your own family. You need to be willing to sacrifice the relationship that you have with your father. You must be willing to give up your mother. To follow Me may bring marital strife, the likes of which you have never seen before. You need to forsake even your children. Your brothers and sisters must take a distant 2nd place to Jesus. I must be more important than your family."

Jesus also said, (in verses 26b-27), "If you want to be my disciple, you need to hate your very life. You need to die to yourself. You need to be willing to give of your life completely for my cause. You need to be ready to suffer cruel torture of the cross. for the sake of My name!"

Jesus said, (in verse 33), "If you want to be my disciple, you need to give up all of your own possessions. All of your earthly resources are Mine. Your paycheck is mine. Your house is mine. Your car is mine. Your IRA is mine. You cannot love the world and mammon."

He says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door" (Luke 13:24). Indeed, this is a narrow door. Some may say that it's hard. But, it's the call of Jesus. This word translated, "Strive" comes from the Greek word, *agwnizomai* (*agonizomai*), from which we get the word, "agonize." We could easily translate this verse, "agonize to enter through the narrow door." Indeed, this is one reason why there are few who enter into the kingdom. Because, the way is difficult.

I have a friend, Steve Watkins, whose childhood dream was to be a Navy SEAL, some of the most disciplined and well-trained of the armed forces. He did indeed become a Navy SEAL, and served in the armed forces. In the process of fighting for our country, he heard the gospel and surrendered his life to Christ. Today, he is a pastor in Kentucky. I met him while he was finishing up his seminary education at the Master's Seminary.

He wrote a book, which was basically his testimony of how God brought him to faith in Christ called, *Meeting God Behind Enemy Lines*. — In this book, he described his training for the Navy SEALs. The training is so difficult, that 70% of those who are approved by the Navy to enter the training, fall out during the training process (p. 31). This was by design. “The job of the instructors was to separate the men from the boys and to present the SEAL teams with a crop of fresh commandos whom the instructors would be proud to accompany behind enemy lines. With that as the instructors’ goal, it is easy to understand why they seemed so heartless and cruel at the time. In reality, it was not that they were heartless or cruel, but that they needed to weed out the ... candidates who might break mentally behind enemy lines and possibly endanger the whole squad” (p. 33).

After several weeks of difficult training, the SEAL candidates went through “Hell Week,” which “was designed to force the trainees who hadn’t yet quit to reconsider the cost of becoming a Navy SEAL. The tactic worked! Near forty persons quit during our Hell Week.” (p. 39). Hell Week started at 9:00pm on Sunday evening with three hours of push-ups, sit-ups, flutter kicks and “other tiring exercises” (p. 40). At midnight the class ...

was ordered into the frigid waters of the Pacific Ocean for “surf torture.” This painful evolution [i.e. the name given for training exercises] involved walking knee-deep into the ocean, then turning to face the beach in one long line. As our class was strung out parallel to the beach, we interlocked our elbows and sat down in the water in synch with the instructor’s command. As we sat down, the water came up to our necks. Wave after wave washed over our heads and shoulders and chilled us to the bone. The rushing waters sucked the heat out of our tired bodies. The painful cold seemed unbearable as we shivered uncontrollably and began to lose body heat and dexterity. At the point when our speech became slurred, the beginning stages of hypothermia, instructors would bring us back onto the beach and engage us in more push-ups, sit-ups, and flutter kicks to restore our bodies to normal temperature” (p. 40).

Three hours of surf torture ended at 3:00am when the class was ordered to run a mile down the beach over to a steel pier that jutted into the ocean. As they ran, they carried inflatable boats on their heads, each boat weighing 250 pounds. Once there, ...

The order was given for us to strip off all our clothes, except the spandex triathlon shorts that we wore as underwear. The air temperature was in the low fifties, and the ocean water was sixty degrees. Just standing without clothes chilled us as the wind made contact with our bare skin. We were then told to lay down with our backs flat on the cold steel pier. It felt so cold at first that I thought my skin was going to stick to the metal. The unbearable cold was intensified when instructors began spraying a cold mist of water of our shaking bodies with a hose. I could hear the knock of bones hitting steel as we shivered uncontrollably.

To warm up, we were ordered to jump into the bay. At a normal body temperature, that would have felt like a freezing plunge. But after the treatment on the pier, the bay water felt refreshingly warm. As soon as our skin temperatures adjusted to the sixty-degree water, however, we slowly began to feel cold again. ... About the time we began to feel cold again, the instructors pulled us out of the water for more torture on the pier. Again the cold spray felt intense, and again uncontrollable shaking resulted. I had never imagined that shivering could be so painful, and our muscles started to cramp from involuntary response to the intense cold. ... I remember the instructors saying that we could secure the evolution if one person quit. Someone did quit, but the evolution continued on” (pp. 41-42).

That’s a great picture of what it means to “strive” to enter the narrow door. It means that we “agonize” to enter the kingdom.

Now, it’s not that we need to “work” to do all of these things to enter the kingdom. Rather, we need to “work” to give up everything for the sake of Christ. We agonize over the loss of our family. We agonize over the loss to ourselves, as we are willing to die for Christ. We agonize over the loss of our financial control to the will of God. These things are like a constant pull on our lives. We need to agonize in letting them go and seeking the prize of Christ.

Jesus follows up the command with ...

2. Four Warnings (verses 24b-28)

#1 - Many will fail to enter (verse 24b).

This is one of the most shocking verses in all of the Scripture. We read (in the last half of verse 24), “Many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

It’s shocking because we know of other passages of Scripture, like Jeremiah 29:13, “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” We know verses like Deuteronomy 4:29, which says, “you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.” But here, we see Jesus acknowledging that there are those who are seeking to enter the kingdom, but won’t be able.

The key here is that the seeking isn’t done with a whole heart. To be sure, there is a seeking to enter, but the seeking isn’t whole-hearted. The promise of Scripture is plain and simple: If you seek the LORD with all your heart, you will find Him. “He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28). But, apparently, there are many who will seek to enter, but won’t be able to get in.

I think that Jesus is talking here about the crowds of people who hover close to Jesus, but never really make the commitment to follow Jesus at all costs. These are those who have an interest in the kingdom. They have an interest in

Jesus. In this sense, they “seek” to enter the kingdom. But, never giving up all, they fail to have what they seek.

Perhaps they hold on to their family. “I can’t forsake my heritage. What will mother think?” Perhaps they hold on to their life. “I want a life of ease. I don’t want a life of conflict. I want to pursue my own things! I don’t want to suffer hardship for being identified as a Christian.” Perhaps they hold on to their finances. “I’ve worked hard all my life. I have built up my own nest egg. I’m going to enjoy it on the golf course. My money won’t go to the Lord’s work.”

It’s sad, but it’s true, many will fail to enter (verse 24b).

#2 - The time is short (verse 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 to us!’ then He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’” (verse 25).

With these words, Jesus pictures the end of time, when the door is finally shut. Those who were casually seeking the kingdom are shut out. Though they knock and pound on the door, Jesus is unwilling to open to them. Because the time is past. They no longer have the opportunity to repent.

You never want something so badly as when you no longer have the opportunity to obtain it. You can see this in children, when one sibling is eating the last of the candy bars. Other brothers and sisters suddenly crave candy bars!

This picture here of Jesus shutting the door may well be the end of time when the kingdom has come. The doors are shut, and judgment is about to begin upon those who never followed Jesus.

But, the opportunity exists for us day. There is an opportunity for you today to come into His kingdom. If you have never done so, confess your sins to Him who is ready to forgive. Put your life behind you. Take up your cross and follow Christ. Believe in Him!

What a tragedy it might be for any of you to say as those in Jeremiah’s day said, “Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jeremiah 9:20). In other words, “Our time has run out! The day of our salvation was there and we missed it!”

Cry out to him before it’s too late. Don’t be shut out. Don’t be one of the crowd. It may well be that there are some of you here this morning who are merely playing the religion game. You come to church week after week. You go through the motions, but Christ has never visited you deeply in your heart. The next warning may deal with you!

#3 - Religion isn’t enough (verses 26-27)

“Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets’ and He will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.’” (verses 26-27).

There will be those seeking entrance into the kingdom who have a familiarity with Jesus! They will say, “Jesus, we know you! We were with you. We invited you to our houses. You ate with us at our table. You drank with us. We heard your teaching!” But, Jesus will reject these people.

They thought that their religious involvement with Jesus was good enough for them. But it wasn’t. Fundamentally, they thought that they were OK. But, they weren’t. Jesus said, “Depart from Me, all you evildoers.”

These were those who were big on religion. They were big on church services. They were big on church attendance. But, they didn’t know Christ. They didn’t follow after Him. Rather, they followed after their own ways.

For you this morning, you may be smug in your involvement at Rock Valley Bible Church. You may think that because you come, you are OK. You may think that because you are involved in a flock, you are OK. Well, you may not be. Religion isn’t enough. You need to know Christ.

I remember when I first heard this taught. It was just over 19 years ago. I was 21 years old. I had been involved in church my whole life. But, I never knew that you could be religious and be lost. There are many people on that final day, who will cry out to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” but they will be denied entrance into the kingdom. They had no relationship with Christ. It was all religion. It was all show for others. When I heard this for the first time, I remember how the Lord pricked my heart and gave me a desire to pursue Christ and to know Him. I didn’t want to be rejected at that final day. And so, God has given to me a desire to “agonize to enter through the narrow door” (13:24). What about you? Are you striving to enter? Or, are you content in your religion?

#4 - The suffering will be terrible (verse 28).

“In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the

prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out" (verse 28).

First of all, Jesus describes the sufferings of hell. He paints an ugly picture. He says that there will be crying and pain.

Imagine yourself, a civil war soldier. You are in battle, and get shot in the leg. Your comrades take you to a place of safety well back of the battle field. There, you meet there with an orthopaedic surgeon, who discovers that he needs to amputate your leg, just below the knee. With little anesthetic around, he takes a lead bullet out of your musket and instructs you to bite the bullet, rather than scream at the intense pain that he was about to inflict. That's what happens for those who reject Christ. They will be in such pain, that they will gnash their teeth in pain. The tears of pain will easily flow.

To make matters worse, those who are shut out will see others enjoying the pleasures of heaven. It's one thing to suffer. It's another thing to suffer, while beholding others in ease. It's one thing to be cleaning the floor. But, when you look up only to see your brother enjoying an ice cream cone, the suffering gets worse! Now, we don't know how long they get to behold Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enjoying the kingdom, but it's enough to inflict an emotional pain that is difficult to bear.

Will you take these warnings to heart?

#1 - Many will fail to enter (verse 24b).

#2 - The time is short (verse 25)

#3 - Religion isn't enough (verses 26-27)

#4 - The suffering will be terrible (verse 28).

In our ways, we might see such warnings as sufficient to turn many sinners away from their evil ways. But, His ways are not our ways. The truth of that matter is that few are saved. Many continue in their wayward ways.

Finally, let's look at ...

3. Another Perspective (verses 29-30)

Jesus gives us another perspective in verses 29-30, "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

Though the number of those who are saved will be few, still there will be a large number of people, brought from all over the world. When John saw the number of those who were saved, he said, "I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Rev. 7:9-10).

This is the thought of Jesus in verse 29. Though the number will be few, and though many will fail to enter, they will come from all over the earth. They will come from the east. They will come from the west. They will come from the north. They will come from the south. You will easily call them "many"!

Every tribe and tongue and people and nation will be represented before the throne of God someday. In this we can rejoice. It matters not when they come, all will share equally in the glories of heaven. The last will be first and the first will be last. We who have come into heaven in the 21st century will enjoy heaven just like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

If you have indeed entered into this salvation, are you thankful to God for all that He has done for your soul?

Thank You Lord for saving My soul.

Thank You Lord for making me whole.

Thank Your Lord for giving to me,

Thy great salvation so rich and free. [\[6\]](#)

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 15, 2007 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] My primary sources for bloodletting came from the following websites: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloodletting> and <http://www.museumofquackery.com/devices/phlebo.htm>

[2] Edward Payson, "God's Ways Above Men's." See <http://www.rvbc.cc/ResourceLibrary/PaysonGodsWays/PaysonGodsWays.htm>.

[3] J. C. Ryle, *Old Paths*, p. 79.

[4] You can order the poster here: <http://www.ccwonline.org/ptorder.html#ap>.

[5] Steve Watkins, *Meeting God Behind Enemy Lines: My Christian Testimony as a U. S. Navy SEAL*. All quotes above have included their page numbers in end notes, rather than footnoting every instance here. For ordering information, see

<http://www.kresschristianpublications.com>.

[6] This is an old, familiar chorus written by Seth Sykes and is contained in our hymnal. It was an appropriate song to sing at the conclusion of this message.