

# Are There Few That Be Saved?

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Multitudes there are who, like the Jews of old, have all the advantages and privileges of outward gospel ordinances and public worship, multitudes enjoy the practice of religion and a form of godliness, who never know the saving power of God's omnipotent mercy. Multitudes keep up the exercises of religion with great diligence, who know nothing of God's salvation. They strive to enter into the kingdom of God; but it is in their own strength. They eat and drink in Christ's presence; and many hear Christ and Him crucified faithfully preached, who perish without Him. Others, scattered among the nations of the world, who never had such privileges, upon hearing the gospel, have the Lord Jesus revealed in them and believe. Such is the discrimination of grace that the last are made first and the first are made last.

I am of the firm and ever deepening conviction that most religious people are lost. Most of the people I preach to in churches throughout this country and around the world are yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. It is not as easy as you might suppose to find one who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ. There are few who trust Christ, few who are committed to Christ, few who are in love with the Lord Jesus Christ. God's elect, contrary to popular opinion, are not to be found in every church. It may well be true that there are few in any gospel church. In the last day multitudes, vast multitudes of religious men and women, who are absolutely sure they are saved, will hear the Son of God say, "Depart from me", and shall be forever consigned to the torments of the damned (Matthew 7:21-23). They believed the truth about Christ. They professed faith in Christ. They preached in the name of Christ. They performed miracles in the name of Christ. They performed many wonderful works in the name of Christ. They had perfect peace, confidence, and assurance that they were saved, born of God, heirs of heaven, and eternal glory. But they were lost, without God, without Christ, without hope. Any honest man who reads those three verses in Matthew 7 must be compelled to ask himself, "Lord, is it I?" As John Newton put it in one of his hymns ...

'Tis a point I long to know,  
Oft it causes anxious thought,  
Do I love the Lord, or no,  
Am I his or am I not?

It is a fact plainly revealed in holy scripture that the vast majority of those who profess faith in Christ and think that all is well with their immortal souls are lost, in the broad road of destruction, which leads to eternal ruin.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ says to you and me, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Let us make neither more nor less of this solemn exhortation than our Lord means by it. And the best way to determine what He means is to look into the context.

### A Striking Question

The Lord Jesus was making His way toward Jerusalem where He would lay down His life for His people. There He would make atonement for our sins by suffering all the horrid wrath of God in our room and stead unto death, satisfying the justice of God for us. As He went His way to Calvary, He taught the gospel. One day, as He walked in the streets teaching the multitudes around Him, obviously, someone thought of what the scriptures teach about divine election and concluded that since there were not many disciples following the Master, and God has only chosen some to be saved, there must be only a few who will be saved.

Satan commonly perverts precious, gospel doctrine into something hard in the minds of men, and takes that which ought to encourage sinners to trust Christ, and makes it a barrier before them. That seems to have been the case here. So one of those who walked with and heard the Lord Jesus raised this question: "Are there few that be saved?"

It is likely that this question was asked by a Jew, and that the two parables illustrating the smallness of the kingdom's beginning suggested it to him. The Jews extended their exclusive spirit even to their ideas of a world to come, so that they believed none but their chosen race would behold its glories. The questioner wanted the Saviour to give His approval to this narrow Jewish spirit, or else to take a position which would subject Him to the charge of being unpatriotic.

Whatever the man's motive was in asking this question, the Lord Jesus answered his question with a very needful admonition: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (v. 24). What does it matter whether God's elect are few or many, if you are not one of them? The Master answered this man's question directly, urging him to make sure that he is in the number, however large or small it might be. Satan does not care if you discuss and debate the things of God twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week as long as you go on to hell without Christ. Multitudes go to hell talking about religion.

People like to poke fun at those of us who believe and preach the blessed, gospel doctrine of divine election, saying, "You folks believe that there are only a select few who will be saved." Well, yes, that is what we believe. Our Lord Jesus Christ said plainly, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Those are the words of God Himself. That settles the question.

I know that in the end God's elect will be a multitude which no man can number, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. Who can tell how many elect infants God has mercifully taken to glory in his acts of judgment upon their ungodly parents? Yet, at any one time, God's elect in this world are few, very few, when compared with the multitudes who perish. In the days of Noah only Noah found grace in the

eyes of the Lord. Lot was the only person in Sodom whom God had chosen. Of the vast multitude who left Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, entered the land of promise. The rest perished in unbelief. There were 851 prophets at Carmel, only Elijah knew God. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he said, "I and some few men with me" came to do the work (Nehemiah 2:12). Isaiah said that when the judgment of God came upon the earth, there would be "few men left" (Isaiah 2:6). A great multitude was carried away into Babylon; but when they came to Jeremiah in repentance, they said, "we are left but a few of many" (Jeremiah 42:2).

Our Lord Jesus said concerning the way of faith and life, "Few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). And in His parables Christ made it plain that there are "few that be saved" (Luke 13:20-25). At the last time, in that age of the church depicted by Sardis there will be only "a few names" found among the faithful (Revelation 3:4).

This is the teaching of holy scripture: among the multitudes who wear the name of Christ, and profess to be His followers, there are only a few who are saved. The rest are perishing under the delusion of a false hope.

Hear the word of the Lord, and be warned. Are you among the many who are perishing; or are you among the few who are chosen, the few who trust Christ alone for eternal salvation? With the apostle Peter, I solemnly admonish you to give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Has Christ been revealed in you? Do you know the Son of God? Do you truly trust Christ alone as your Saviour? Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Master? If you will be honest, you can know whether or not you are among the few whom God has chosen. You can know your election. Paul told the Thessalonians plainly that he knew they were God's elect for five reasons (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10). These are certain identifying marks of God's elect.

God's elect hear and receive the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Being taught of God, they are assured of divine truth. God's elect follow Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 6). Like Christ, those who are truly born of God, believe God, serve God with patience, hope, and love, and walk before Him in the joy of faith. Like their Master, the people of God persevere in the hour of trial. They follow Him.

God's elect are committed to Christ and to the gospel of His grace (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

God's elect repent of their sins and turn to God with a true heart (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

God's elect live in this world as men and women of expectation and hope, "waiting for his son" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

If indeed you and I are among those who are elect of God, our hearts should be filled with gratitude, praise, and admiration for Him (Romans 11:33-36). The only difference between the many who perish and the few who are chosen is the difference which grace has made (1 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-14). As for me, I gladly ascribe the whole of my salvation to God, who loved me freely with an everlasting love and saved me by His grace. "By the grace of God I am what I am." I am chosen by grace, redeemed by grace, called by grace, given faith to believe by grace, preserved by grace, and free grace alone shall bring me safely into

heaven's eternal glory (Jude 24, 25).

Oh! to grace, how great a debtor,  
Daily I'm constrained to be.

#### A Sobering Exhortation

Then our Lord Jesus Christ gives us this very sobering exhortation: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (v. 24). The word "strive" means "to agonize, labour fervently, and fight" to enter in at the strait gate. The word "strait" means "narrow, constricted, contracted, or close". Here the Lord is showing us our responsibility. Our concern must not be what others may do, or even what may happen to others. Our responsibility is to seek the Lord ourselves, whether anyone else does or not.

The unbelief and indecision of others will be no excuse in the last day. We must never follow the multitudes. If we go to heaven alone, we must resolve by the grace of God to do so. If we follow Christ alone, we must be resolved to let all others perish if they will, but we will not perish with them. Whether we have many with us, or few, our responsibility is plain "Strive to enter in."

We must not go on in our unbelief, saying, "I can do nothing until God draws me." It is my responsibility to draw near to God. "Strive to enter in." God's election and my own inability have nothing to do with my responsibility. I must "strive to enter in". "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

#### A Solemn Warning

Then our Lord sets before us a very plain and solemn warning (vv. 25-30). "When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are." The long and short of that is this: There is a day coming when the forbearance of God shall come to an end. He declares, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Genesis 6:5). You can make what you want of that. Men can argue and debate for the rest of their lives about whether that is sound doctrine or rank Arminianism. I really have no interests in their wrangling. My concern is for your soul. And I know this, there is a day appointed by God when the door of mercy, which has been open to you for so long, shall be shut.

There comes a time when men and women cannot be saved, even while they live they are dead (Proverbs 1:22-31; Hosea 4:17). "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). Our Lord is saying, Strive to enter in now while you may, while the door is open before you, for the door will not always be open (Jeremiah 7:13-16).

## A Day Of Reckoning

Then our Lord assures us that there is a day of reckoning and righteous judgment coming.

"Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last" (Luke 13:26-30).

Many who think they are saved shall find themselves at last under the wrath of the Lamb (vv. 26-28). Their religious profession, their great experiences, their doctrinal knowledge, their mighty works will all be vanity.

All will see what is right when it is too late. Hell is a place where truth is known too late! But in that last day all believers shall receive the full reward of heaven and eternal glory (vv. 29, 30).

In this whole passage our Lord is making an allusion to the ancient marriage feasts, which were held at night. The house would be all lit up. And those who were admitted to the marriage feast would be in the light. Those who were excluded were in darkness outside, "outer darkness". The guests entered by a narrow wicket gate, at which the porter stood to prevent any uninvited people from rushing into the feast. When all who had been invited were in the house, the door was shut. It would not be opened to those who were without, no matter how much they knocked (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2).

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