

We started walking through four middle chapters of Luke, learning from Jesus about the character of God and discovered, perhaps to our surprise, our popular image of God is vastly different from who He really is!

God gave us strict instructions not to carve, sculpt, mould or shape any image of Him, and with good reason. The human **mind** cannot begin to comprehend God's incredible Majesty, the human **will** finds it difficult to yield to His awesome power, and the human **heart** resists submitting to His absolute authority! Those who cannot accept God's incredible Majesty, His awesome power, His absolute authority, cannot experience His extraordinary love, His unimaginable mercy, His unbelievable grace and His unconditional forgiveness.

This goes for any and all relationships: unless we spend time appreciating the qualities of the other person, we cannot appreciate their gifts, nor accept their gifting.

This is the starting point of Jesus' course on **Introduction to God**¹. I can attest to the fact, while I was a professing and believing Christian growing up, it was not until I was around 30 years old that I discovered I was totally clueless about **eternity**. I had always defined it as *unending time*, but if eternity has no time, how can I define something, by something it does not have? I was trying to understand **eternity** from my perspective. Only when I appreciated God's eternity (*not mine*), did I start on a serious journey of relationship-building with Him.

Job (book before **Psalms**), was a godly man who thought he knew what God wanted and did it diligently. In an instant, his life is destroyed, his wife told him to curse God and die, his three friends lectured and raked him over the coals for things he **must have, could have, most likely,...** **possibly** done something wrong, for God to punish him so very drastically. Read on from chapter 38 when God asks Job, *Who is this that*

¹ Luke 13

questions My wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.

God asks Job 77 questions through which He reveals His Majesty, His Power and His Authority, at the end of which Job says to God, *I know you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You Lord, asked, ‘Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?’ It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me. You Lord, said, ‘Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.’ Until then, I had only **heard** about you, but now I have **seen** you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.*

When confronted with God’s incredible Majesty, His awesome power and His absolute authority, Job experienced God’s extraordinary love, His unimaginable mercy, His unbelievable grace and His unconditional forgiveness.

A long but necessary introduction to our passage today.

For the second time² Luke tells us, Jesus came with a resolute goal of getting to Jerusalem at God’s appointed time, for that is where past and present would meet, and He would destroy the power of death which separated us from God, forever! Chapter 13 starts with Jesus journeying resolutely towards Jerusalem, and ends with Jesus stating emphatically, *I will accomplish my purpose! Today, tomorrow and the next day, I must proceed on my way, for it would not do for a prophet of God to be killed, except in Jerusalem*³.

As Jesus is travelling, teaching, preaching and healing, someone asked Him the question, *“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved (i.e. rescued, delivered from the penalties of the last judgment, to share Christ’s salvation?”*

The question reflects a debate among Jews at the time of Christ: one Rabbi said, all Jews would be saved, and another Rabbi said, only a few. The questioner was clever: if his question was impertinent, he was on the

² first time in 9:51

³ 32-33

side of “all Jews being saved”, but if he was curious, he would have been on the side of “a few being saved”. This kind of debate blows up into an argument, which achieves nothing, and Jesus would be drawn into it.

Once again, Jesus corrects our focus: it's not about being **saved from**, which is driven by fear - *I don't want to go to that horrible place, so I will do what it takes not to go there!* Like a child who does not want to go to school will say and do whatever it takes to be **saved from** going to school, because school is horrible, unpleasant and the child is frightened of being there.

The **REAL** question is, what we are being **saved for!** When you know, you are being saved for something so special, so spectacular, so beyond your imagination, you will do whatever it takes to be there and experience it!

Jesus' natural reply to the questioner is, *Whether few, many or all are saved, is none of your business. Put YOUR mind on YOUR life with God. The way to real life, to God's life, is hard work, and requires your total attention. Many of you assume you will sit down at God's salvation banquet just because you've been hanging around Him all your lives. One day you will bang on the door, wanting to get in, but you'll find the door locked and the Master saying, 'Sorry, you're not on my guest list.'*

People say, *This is not fair! Why should I be excluded from God's eternal banquet when I have not done anything wrong, and have been good all my life? Not fair!*

Jesus tells us “why” some will be excluded. He repeats it twice, so take note, it is important: *I don't know you, or where you came from!* In other words, *We don't have a relationship; should I know you? This banquet is for friends and among friends, those who have cultivated a relationship with me.*

This might offend us, but this is exactly what we all do, perhaps not literally! **We** banquet with friends we know, whose company we enjoy, and with whom we are comfortable! Why should it upset us then, that God thinks and does the same?!

Remember, Jesus is setting the record straight about God. A casual

acquaintance with God, and having a relationship with Him through Christ, are not the same.

Jesus wants to balance our imbalanced relationship: God knows us from before we were conceived; He wants us to know Him before we spend eternity with Him.

We are God's **most** precious creation. What God has planned for us in eternity, for eternity, is worth being saved for! We are familiar with Psalm 23 - a picture of the Shepherd who cares and provides for us here and now, and a picture of God's banquet prepared for us!

In Psalm 23, those who journeyed through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil, a banquet awaits them. Jesus coaxes us to strive, to work hard to enter the narrow door leading to God's kingdom where His banquet table has been prepared, waiting our arrival!

Many are offended. *If God wants me, why does He make it so difficult to get into His kingdom? I know God is merciful and He will show me mercy; I have journeyed as far as the narrow gate. Surely He knows, working my way through a narrow gate is not my thing. I expect Him to understand and let me through!*

God is not a Bouncer at the door of a popular night club everyone wants to get in, who is looking for those with the right credentials and can flash a bit of cash, and He will let them in.

Our view of human life and our system of life's values are very different from God's. To the Jews who felt they were privileged people, Jesus says, *People will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God. And note this: Some who seem least important now will be the greatest then, and some who are the greatest now will be least important then.*

One of the currents running in parallel during this pandemic is the issue of race. The human race values some people more than others, but God values **ALL** people! Our values stand in stark contrast to God's.

Our passage today confronts us with the question, *Do you know Who is waiting for you when this journey ends? Are you journeying with confidence to meet the One who is eagerly waiting for you? Or does it not matter whom you meet; you are prepared to take the chance; anything is better than what you have now?*

This journey of life here and now, is about appreciating the unrivalled person of God. Both the prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul ask the same question, *Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor?*⁴

Appreciating God's unrivalled majesty, power and authority is the first step in developing a relationship with Him. What follows is natural: you begin to experience God in ways you have never known. If you need His mercy, you will have it; if you need his forgiveness, He will remove all memory of wrong, as far as the east is from the west; if you need His grace to overcome a difficult relationship, He grants it for the asking; if you need the His love, stretch out your hands in submission, and before you ask, you will experience His comforting embrace.

Don't ask, *Lord! Will only a few be saved?*

His answer, *Why are you concerned about others being saved?*

Ask instead, *Lord! I want to be saved for a place at the banquet table in your Kingdom. You know me before I was conceived, now I want a relationship with you, I want to know You more than I ever have. Write my name on Your guest list. I don't want to miss what You have prepared for me!* **AMEN.**

⁴ Isaiah 40:13 and Romans 11:34