

Who Are the Many and the Few?

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[0:00] Amen. Okay, take your Bibles and open them if you would.

! Matthew chapter 7. And we're answering this question tonight. A question turned in by possibly someone right out here in this room.

! I don't know who turned this in to me. But here's the question. Who are the many and the few in Matthew chapter 7 verses 13 and 14?

So if you've got Matthew 7 opened up there, look at verse 13. Famous passage. Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction.

And there are many who go in by it. Now, you've heard that passage before, and it's an intriguing one in many different ways.

[1:08] Now, the question focuses on just one small part of it. And really, honestly, the answer is quite simple. There isn't anything complicated about the answer, about who the many are and who the few are.

But I don't want to just answer the question real quickly and then go home. We couldn't do that. Just wouldn't be right. In fact, I hope maybe I can drag this out and make it a two-parter.

No, I'm just kidding. Just kidding. Maybe I shouldn't say just kidding. We'll wait to see how it comes out here. But what I decided to do is take the opportunity or let the question create on occasion to speak about possibly another issue, a very important issue that we need to understand about this text and this whole idea.

If I might assume what is behind the question, and I don't know that, but maybe some important issue behind the question, and maybe we can answer that tonight.

All right, some introductory considerations about the passage. I think that's a good way to start. I despise this podium. Well, my notes kind of slip in underneath it.

[2:32] Well, anyway. All right. Number one. The subject in the passage is salvation. Duh.

Certainly, after I read it and you looked through it, you would have assumed that the subject is salvation. Although there are some scholars who would say that the idea is something else, that it has something to do with ethics, Christian ethics, and maybe some other things.

But clearly, the subject here is salvation. Salvation. Salvation. Verse 14. The way which leads to life. Life.

Salvation. Eternal life. All right. So the subject is salvation. Number two. The intention of the passage is to issue a command.

The intention of the passage is to issue a command. That is, that's Jesus' intent here. In these words, which, by the way, come to us near the close of the famous Sermon on the Mount.

[3:36] And some scholars, theologians, say that it really is the culmination of the entire sermon. I think it's MacArthur who made that conclusion.

And so, his intent here is very clearly this, to issue a command. And we don't have to guess about that because the very first phrase, enter by the narrow gate, is a command.

It's a command. And not only does it sound like one, but grammatically it is one. It is an imperative. You're probably not going to need to write this down, but it is an imperative, aorist, active, second person verb.

What does that mean? Well, let me translate. I could give a full translation this way. It would be this. It would be like Jesus saying, You. You once and for all enter that narrow gate.

It's a command. And it's a very strong command. It's not an ongoing thing you do. Now, keep on entering in.

[4:45] It is once and for all enter in that gate. It's a command. You. You do this. All right. So, the intent is to issue a command. Third, the focus in the passage is on the decision.

Decision every person must and will make. The focus here is on a decision.

Decision every person inevitably will, will make, must make. That is, a decision about which gate to enter and which way to go in this life.

All right. Now, follow me along here. Because there are some, some pretty important, or a pretty important theological issue here.

We're going to get to that. And that's why, why I said I'm taking the occasion to deal with a certain issue, theological issue. And so, number four, the doctrinal perspective, or the view here, from a doctrinal standpoint, the doctrinal perspective in the passage is the responsibility of man in salvation.

[6:11] Folks, there's no way to deny that here in this text. The perspective here, the view here from a doctrinal position, is the responsibility of man in salvation.

And this is important that we understand this, that we discuss this. The doctrine of salvation, or soteriology, that's the technical word for it.

Soter is the Greek word for salvation. Soteriology. The doctrine of salvation represents, and here's the word I want you to put in that blank, and you're going to think, what?

It represents an antinomy. Now, you see the word right below so you can spell it yourself. Or did I put that on there? Did I? All right, okay. Antinomy.

You say, what is that? Antinomy. I'm not trying to wow you with my incredible scholarship, because I'm not a scholar.

[7:22] But I do understand this word, and it has a tremendous significance in understanding the doctrine of salvation. Antinomy.

An antinomy. And what is an antinomy? Well, let's pick the word apart. Anti. We know what that word suggests. Anti means what? Against. Or opposed to.

Or in contradiction to. All right, so anti, and then the word nomi, or the last part of it, nomi, might not be familiar.

It is from the word nomos, and it means law. It means law. So you put the two together, that's anti-law. That's not anti-law in the sense of I'm against law.

It is literally this, opposing laws. An antinomy is something that appears to be, or appears to be in opposition, opposition to two laws.

[8:23] All right, it's opposing laws, or contradictory laws. And already you're wondering, and this is important? It is.

And you'll see why here in a minute. The dictionary definition would be this. I'm talking about the secular dictionary. In fact, I think it was Webster that I looked at. Opposition. This is what antinomy, the definition of an antinomy is.

Opposition or contradiction between one law, or principle, or rule, or etc., and another. So, an opposition between one law and another.

Or a contradiction between one principle, or rule, or truth, and another. A contradiction that seems to be between the two.

You have two laws, two truths, two principles, and they don't seem to go together. In fact, they seem to be contradictory. Follow me along here.

[9:22] Okay, don't give up on me. Check out here. But in the biblical context, and I've given you the, that's the secular dictionary definition.

But in the biblical context, since we're talking about within the context of biblical truth, then we must add the word apparent to the definition.

So it would be an apparent, or the appearance of, a contradiction between one law and another. Not that there actually is a contradiction, but it appears to be a contradiction.

And, dear folks, the reality is, there is no real contradiction between any two biblical truths. No matter what it may appear.

There is no real contradiction. Sometimes it just looks like it is. And that's the idea of antinomy in regard to the true truths I'm about to give you here.

[10:28] So what is the apparent contradiction, the antinomy in the biblical doctrine of salvation? What is it? Divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Are you following me? I've just defined what an antinomy is. It is the appearance of a contradiction between two truths.

And those two truths, within the context of salvation, doctrine of salvation, those two truths are divine sovereignty and salvation and human responsibility.

You cannot read Scripture and deny, though there might be differing explanations, differing conclusions, but at the end of the day, you cannot deny the sovereignty of God, divine sovereignty in salvation.

You cannot deny that. Even if it's just simply you understand that salvation is by grace and grace alone. Or maybe your conclusions have led you to the place where you believe that salvation is something that God takes the initiative in.

[11:59] And maybe you go further than that. You know, in your conceptualizing what you understand from Scripture is the divine sovereignty side of salvation.

You can't deny it. It's there. It's in Scripture. You also cannot deny the human responsibility of salvation. You cannot deny it. It is all throughout the Bible.

Both appear in Scripture. And therefore, there is a true, this is a true antinomy. It's not a paradox. A paradox primarily centers on the words of two statements.

It's not so much on two undeniable truths. It's much stronger than a paradox. Antinomy to undeniable truths.

This is a true antinomy. The divine sovereignty of God in salvation and the human responsibility in salvation. It's an antinomy. It's unavoidable.

[13:03] Both truths appear in the Bible sometimes side by side. It is indispensable in the sense that you cannot explain it away.

You cannot do it. And it doesn't make any difference whether you are a staunch Calvinist or whether you are on the other side a staunch Arminian in your...

and without going into detail explain those two positions. It doesn't make any difference. Which side do you fall on on that? You cannot deny this antinomy.

You cannot explain it away. In fact, it is unexplainable. It's incomprehensible. I'm just trying to fortify just what an antinomy is.

It's incomprehensible. That is, you cannot figure it out. You cannot. John 6.37 All that the Father gives me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.

[14:14] It's a hint of that antinomy. And then you add to that John 6.44 no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day. And there are many other examples that we could go to.

Alright, now here's another question then as we're talking about this antinomy. What should we do with it? What should we do with an antinomy? An apparent contradiction or this particular apparent contradiction.

What should we do with it? Well, accept it. Accept it. Accept the antinomy for what it is and learn to live with it.

That seems like the same as saying drop back and punt and I'm not going to say that. You just accept it. It's Scripture. It's part of Scripture and I believe it.

I don't have to explain it. I don't understand electricity. I can't explain how that works. But we're not going to sit around in the dark until we figure it out, are we?

[15:23] There are a lot of things in Scripture that are impossible to explain. You explain to me the Trinity. I heard Adrian Rogers say on many occasions to try to explain it you lose your mind.

But to deny it you lose your soul. So, we ought not worry about it. About trying to explain the two.

The two are there. Now, that's not enough. We don't just simply accept it for what it is and learn to live with it. There's a second thing. Avoid the following man-centered temptations.

I might even say in some regards the emotional temptations. Number one, to think of it as inconsistent.

An antinomy is not an inconsistency because in the mind of God it makes perfect sense. Just because we can't figure it out or that from our perspective it seems inconsistent, we ought not accept it as an inconsistency.

[16:43] Think of it as that. Because in the mind and heart of God it works perfectly. Works perfectly. The other temptation I think would be that we ought to resist avoid is to think of God as unfair or somehow unjust.

Romans 9.19 And of course there's much more to Romans 9 that we could spend months talking about.

But Paul says you will say to me then why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will? That is if you come from the perspective of the focus on the divine sovereignty of God and salvation then if no one can resist his will then why should God find fault?

He says but indeed oh man who are you to reply against God? And this is the part of the passage I really want us to consider. Who are you to reply in that way against God?

Because the translation or the implication is God this is inconsistent God this is not fair. Will the thing formed say to him who formed it why have you made me thus?

[18:19] Does not the potter have power over the clay? So we don't think of this apparent contradiction as you know that salvation is all God it's divine it's his sovereignty and yet man is responsible we don't think of God as unfair third to we ought to avoid the temptation to give exclusive attention to any one side of the antinomy this contradiction or the two sides to give exclusive attention to one of these truths and what do I mean by that well there are those who would give exclusive attention to the human responsibility of salvation I'll quote

J.I. Packer and by the way if you have a lot of questions about the doctrines of grace and how they can work in evangelism and you ought to get J.I.

Packer's book evangelism and the sovereignty of God it's a tremendous book and here's what he said about those who would put their fixation on or their attention given only to the human responsibility side to the exclusion of the divine sovereignty side or the sovereignty of God side he said this if we forget that only God can give faith we shall start to think that the making of converts depends in the last analysis not on God but on us and that the decisive factor is the way in which we evangelize by the same token and some do give exclusive attention to the sovereignty of God side of this apparent contradiction this antinomy again Packer said the doctrine of divine sovereignty would be grossly misapplied if we should invoke it in such a way as to lessen the urgency and immediacy and priority and binding constraint of the evangelistic imperative now there's a lot of maybe big high powered words translation those and there are

I think some other problematic things to attention given exclusively to the sovereignty of God and salvation but one of them is the death of evangelism death of and so the two what we ought to do is not try to not look at these things as inconsistent and say you know this just doesn't make any sense so I just throw both of them out not concentrating on one to the exclusion of the other we ought to look at them as two wonderful truths in God's word that somehow in the mind and heart of God work perfectly together and then we should lastly acknowledge and apply each side of the antinomy as they appear in scripture not try to force both of them into every passage that deals with salvation and this is a mistake that that sometimes we make because some passages in the Bible like the one we're going to be looking at tonight here the focus there is not the sovereignty of God in salvation the focus is man's responsibility responsibility and and so we ought to just consider these truths acknowledge them and apply the truth as they appear in scripture okay and so that leads us back to Matthew 7 and the assumption that Jesus is addressing not the sovereignty of God in salvation but rather man's responsibility and so let's move to the meaning of the passage the passage number one the passage opens as I've already said with a command to obey there's a command given here enter by the narrow gates very clear so here's

[23:16] Jesus he's preaching some even though I might agree that Jesus is speaking to his disciples but through them there are a multitude of people gathered here many of them lost people and so the passage opens with a command to obey there's a command it's decision time and there are people in some circles even the word decision makes people cringe what decision we don't decide to be saved yes you do you decide to respond to the gospel and here Jesus is issuing a command to respond in obedience to the gospel and enter that narrow gate that leads to life and it is a command he intends to be obeyed again we're not trying to bring in both sides of this antinomy here because

Jesus doesn't the fact of the matter is here's a preacher who's issuing a plea to come to Christ to choose life so whether you want to use the word decision or choice or whatever that's what he's commanding here to be made all right I get a little tired of my Calvinist buddies I really do get a little tired of having such a fixation on the sovereign side of salvation that they can't even bring themselves to the place to issue an invitation to anybody that somehow it's going to be an encroachment on the sovereignty of God do we feel like we have to help out God and his sovereignty no I want to honor it and keep it intact and

I believe God is the one who saves but when it comes to presenting the gospel I plead with people to repent and trust Christ choose Jesus today and I don't have any problem with that this is exactly what Jesus does here enter that narrow gate that leads to life alright Jesus secondly confronted his hearers with an actual decision to make this is an actual decision to be made it is a bonafide plea to make a decision or command to decide John MacArthur let me give you a quote from John MacArthur and he said in perfect harmony with his absolute sovereignty God has always allowed men to choose him or not and he has always pleaded with them to decide for him or face the consequences of a choice against him since mankind turned their backs on him in the fall God has bent every effort and spared no cost in wooing his creatures back to himself he has provided and shown the way leaving nothing nothing to man but the choice God made his choice by providing the way of redemption the choice then is now man's John MacArthur number three Jesus command to choose the way of salvation is consistent with other appeals in the Bible Moses in Deuteronomy 30 verse 19 I'll just quote that passage for you I call heaven and earth as witnesses! today against you that I have set before you life and death blessing and cursing therefore choose life that both you and your descendants may live that you may love the Lord your God that you may obey his voice and you may cling to him for he is your life choose life Joshua Joshua 24 15 and if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve Elijah 1 Kings 18 21 how long will you falter between two opinions if the Lord is God follow him but if Baal follow him the choice choice the choice and number four each of the four key elements of Jesus metaphor and it's a metaphor are presented in pairs it's kind of interesting in the text there are two gates two ways two destinations and two groups of people two groups of people very clear you don't have to be a scholar to figure that out just very clear and [28 : 30] Bruce was in here a while ago and so he got a good chuckle he had been on to me about providing another little drawing illustration he just I don't know in fact he came to me the other day or last week or sometime and kind of half way apologized but but it does kind of illustrate a little bit here at least on one account if you see those two gates there one's narrow one's wide obviously you see that and you see in the background there maybe on your copy it might be a little faint but the narrow one you see the path in behind the gate and it leads to heaven doesn't it leads to Where?

To hell. Alright, ultimately that will be the destination. And yet the little sign there on each one of them says the same thing. That's not a mistake on my part. I didn't make a mistake. Both gates say this is the way to life. People don't choose the broad gate because it leads to hell. And they want to go there. Have you ever met anybody who just really wanted to go to hell? Now I did meet some Yahoo one time. I was street witnessing there in Millington, Tennessee at the base. And a group of guys, you know, stopped them and shared the gospel with them. And one of them thought he wanted to impress his buddies. And he said, I'm going to hell and that's where I want to go.

[30 : 23] So they walked on and said, well, that's probably where you're going. If something doesn't change. But the idea here is that there are two gates.

Alright. There's a narrow gate and a wide gate. And both gates say heaven. That's the idea here in the text.

We're not comparing two gates that advertise different destinations. They advertise the same destination. So there are two gates.

One narrow and the other wide. The narrow one, of course, is the one that leads to the way. That is, at least in this translation, the way that is difficult.

King James, I think, uses the word narrow. Does it use the word narrow again? Anybody have a King James? And then, I believe, oh, the New American Standard might use the word hard.

[31 : 27] The hard way. So the narrow gate, it's narrow. And what does that mean, narrow, do you think? Or as some translate it, it leads to a hard way.

It's narrow because it is the way of the cross. I mean, it just is the way of the cross. And it is not hard in the sense that somehow it's a life that we just can't live.

And so that's why people don't choose it. It's hard because it does carry with it points of persecution and suffering and taking up your cross and following Christ.

It is a way of self-sacrifice. And so it just is. So it's narrow in that sense. I think I've heard others suggest that maybe the narrow pertains to the fact that it will only take one in.

You can't go in in pairs. Just one. That is, salvation is an individual thing. You're not going to heaven because you're part of a Christian family or you're a citizen of this Christian nation.
[32 : 40] I heard one preacher say, just because kittens are... How did he put that? I've lost it. Maybe I shouldn't even give it to you. Okay.

Just because kittens are born in a bread basket doesn't make them biscuits. Alright. Just because you're born in America doesn't make you a Christian. Alright? You get it?

Okay. Well, that was pitiful. I should have just left that off. But the point is, you know, in all seriousness, and I think certainly the implication is valid.

It's a narrow gate because you don't go in in groups. It's narrow because... And the way, also, the way it leads to is difficult.

And the New King James translation says difficult. It's a word that means to be under a press. That's what the word means.

[33 : 40] And it is difficult. It is the way of sacrifice. It is the way of the cross. And it is sometimes a hard way. And it leads to a certain destination.

So you have the gate that's narrow that leads to the way that is difficult and hard because it's the way of the cross. But it leads to the destination of life.

It leads to life. And it is right to conclude that we're talking there about eternal life. And you can use the word heaven. That's exactly, ultimately, where that way will lead.

The destination is heaven. And then there are two groups of people. Now, I'll leave that off for a minute. Let's go back to the other gate, the other gate that is wide. And what would wide mean?

Well, a lot of people can fit through that gate. You know. A lot of different ways a person can choose. Now, Jesus doesn't talk about multiple gates in multiple ways.

[34 : 44] But the idea that it's a broad gate implies that people do choose many different ways that they think are going to lead them to eternal life or however they might conceptualize that.

And they might pick this way or that way or this way. And, I mean, anybody's way is as good as any other way. I mean, as long as you're sincere. That's what they say. Well, they're sincerely wrong. But just any way, see. But all those different ways are really going to lead to the same destination. There's just one real way and it is the broad way or the wide gate and the broad way and it leads to destruction.

But again, I want to emphasize the reality that people do not pick the wide gate. Well, they don't pick it at all, really. As a matter of fact, I would point out that the only command here is to choose the narrow gate, the end of the narrow gate.

You don't have to command people to pick the wide gate because if they don't pick the narrow gate, every other way they pick is the broad gate because there are only two choices.

[36 : 04] And everyone is going to make, inevitably will make, a choice one way or the other. And that's why their condemnation is justified because they choose to reject Christ and by their rejection of Christ, they have chosen hell.

So God doesn't send them to hell. They choose to go there. Right? That's right. And then, let's talk about these two groups of people because that was the original question, wasn't it?

Two groups of people. One, the few, and the other, the many. So, you know, it's not difficult to put all this together in your mind. The narrow gate leads to the hard, difficult way, but it's the way that leads to life and few there are who choose who are into that way.

Few. And the other gate, the gate that is wide, leads to the broad way that ultimately leads to destruction. And the many, the many have entered that gate.

Alright? Now let's take the many first. The many are simply those who refuse to obey the gospel. Refuse to respond in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[37 : 28] That's the many. They thought their way to God would work. In fact, Luke 13, let me just read that to you real quick.

The focus is judgment day. The ultimate judgment. In Luke 13, 24, strive to enter through the narrow gate.

for many, for many I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. I'll be able on judgment day, that is, when once the master of the house has risen up and shut the door and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door saying, Lord, Lord, open for us and he will answer and say to you I do not know you where you are from. That's kind of awkward English there. Then they will begin to say we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets but he will say I tell you I do not

know you where you are from. Depart from me all you workers of iniquity. And so that will be the many.

And then the few are those who obey the gospel and find the way to life.

He ends that with find. The word find. I don't think we need to make a whole lot of that. And there are few who find it.

[39:03] But the idea here is well, Jeremiah 29.13 one of my favorite passages in the Old Testament says you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all of your heart.

I love that passage. And so the few are those who obey the gospel. That's why I say it's not complicated. I could have answered the question in less than two minutes. But I don't like to do things that way.

And so I've chosen to even go past my time. But listen we're talking about salvation and the perspective here in view of man's responsibility.

responsibility. And it is a true statement to say that every every person who will come to Christ can come to Christ.

That is just as true as saying that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draw him. There's the intent of me. It's true.

[40:18] John 6.37 again all that the Father gives me will come to me. They will. And the one who comes to me I will in no by no means I will cast them out.