

# Come From The Highways And Byways

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     have hope? Then what next? What about ultimate hope? Can we, knowing how sinful we are and how depraved our minds can be, have any hope of getting to heaven? What hope do we have?

What hope do you have of getting to heaven? WikiHow is a relatively well-known website which gives advice on commonplace things like how to change a tire, what to do if you have a temperature? But when you ask the question on this website, how to have hope, we can see it from the world's point of view. It goes as follows. One, envision your life. Figure out how you want your life to look. I just decide maybe in an afternoon. Number two, compare your ideal vision of your present life circumstances to your vision. I have a deep, probable, depressive, obsessive look at yourself. Number three, compare your ideal vision to your present life circumstances.

I apologize. Consider, number three, consider whether you have realistic or unrealistic expectations of your life. I.e. in this one, scrap everything you've done in point one and two and start again because everything that you've thought is too grand. Number four, set yourself life goals.

I.e. just fix it in your power. This is the world's plan for having hope and we wonder why our world is in a moral and ethical and in almost every other sense, a race to the bottom. Just as well, our hope can reside in Jesus, who speaks to us through his words written faithfully in his holy scriptures.

So let's turn to that. This evening, we will be carrying out an analysis of the protagonists and antagonists in the passage in the first part of the sermon under two headings, the lions in the den and the one who shuts lions mouths. And the second part, we'll examine the great call. Firstly, the call to the Jews, then the call to the Gentiles and the call to us. Just like the parable of the prodigal son can be more accurately and commonly called the parable of the loving father, the parable of the great banquet could just be as correctly called the parable of the great call to come from the highways and the byways. Let's start our discovery together and where our true hope does lie. Firstly, the lions in the den.

[ 3 : 3 4 ]     Who are we speaking of? The Pharisees. They have invited Jesus to dine on the Sabbath, as it says in verses 1 and verse 12. However, if you look at verse 1, they were watching him carefully. They were waiting to see whether Jesus would heal a man on the Sabbath who was in need. Their intent was clear and it was not out of genuine joy at his wonders or his words, but with the enmity that they had towards him from the start of his ministry to his death and beyond. Like a lion on the prowl for a gazelle, this was entrapment.

He was invited to fall into sin as they saw it in their own eyes by healing on the Sabbath. For further context, this follows chapter 13, verses 10 through 17, where Jesus heals on a previous Sabbath, a woman with a disabling spirit. She glorified God. But what was the ruler of the synagogue's response? He was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. Indignant. Jesus, rightly there, puts him in his place. This, in this passage, is again an attempt to trip up Jesus. Not learning the lessons from before, Jesus highlights once again their clear hypocrisy and even worse, their lack of love.

from verse 5. And he said to them, which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out? And they could not reply to these things. This is the underlying tension of Christ healing on Sabbath and shaming these spiritual leaders, which is the frame for this parable. The reality of the Pharisees is shown with precise clarity in verse 15, which says, When one of those who reclined at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. You can almost picture the Pharisee raising his arms to his colleagues at the table, stating, They are the ones who are blessed and have the birthright to claim their place in heaven. If this wasn't true, he was certainly claiming his own right, a confidence based on his own religious piety. Our very own Campbell Brown highlighted a couple of weeks years ago, this self-centric, self-praising practice of the Pharisees. They had an inflated opinion of themselves. It was like they had a golden statue, like the one Nebuchadnezzar made of himself, in their own hearts, that looks like a rose-tinted version of themselves, which they would expect everyone around to bow down and to worship. They're also the subject of whom Jesus speaks of within the parable, giving various empty excuses to avoid a banquet. In verse 18 and 19, both men give empty excuses, as in buying a field or oxen, before seeing them, which at the very best would be bad business. But even if this was the case, another day and another night would make no difference.

The third excuse, given in verse 20, may hope to be valid on the basis of scripture, found in Deuteronomy 24, verse 5, which says, Even that which has what seems like biblical backing is empty, because that's a regulation which was to exempt men from military service for a year. Not evade every social obligation that they'd committed to previously. All these excuses are putting themselves first, which is the reverse of Paul's teaching in Philippians 2, 3 to 4.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. But in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

[ 9 : 20 ] They represent the opposite of what they're called to do, to love, to care, and to teach the people faithfully and truth from scripture. When speaking of opposites, let's now turn our consideration to the one who shuts lions' mouths, our very own Lord Jesus Christ.

In all reverence, he's not a storyteller in the sense of a twee hallmark card, tied up in a bow, or a general fortune cookie. No, he is God incarnate, whose words expound hope, salvation, and love.

He is accessible to us through his teachings and parables. We can be joyfully wooed by a God-man who is transcendent in his holiness, yet approachable because he approaches us.

R.C. Sproul, when speaking of this, said, We are secure, not because we hold tightly to Jesus, but because he holds tightly to us.

Christ has given everything for us. When we speak of Jesus being approachable, what's he doing in this passage that we have in front of us?

[ 10 : 56 ] He is walking into the lion's den for the sake of the lions themselves. Jesus knows fully the intent of the Pharisees' hearts, but he still attends and speaks out.

He's in control. He questions the sincerity of the hospitality given, based on the sure knowledge of a return invite. The teaching he gives in verse 14 regarding true hospitality is supported in Scripture in Proverbs 19, verse 17, which reads, Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.

He gives an opportunity once again for these hard-hearted men to humble themselves and truly love God.

Repent of their self-indulgent love and love the one who is love itself, which we heard about this morning.

He could attend and say nothing, hurrying them to their well-deserved destination. But he is of the same mind as the Father, who time and time and time again, throughout the Scriptures, calls on unrepentant people to turn back to him.

[ 12 : 30 ] He fights for them, even though they do not understand it. He also does nothing outwith his own character. In Matthew 5, 44, Jesus himself says, But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Whereas, we as parents can so often say, and I'm very aware I'm very new to this, do as I say, not as I do. The true God man can say, do what I say because I did it first and I will always do it.

Jesus shows this teaching of loving his enemies and continuing to contend for his enemies who he's currently in the midst of.

Who is Jesus? He is the one offering salvation as well as being salvation itself. So to recap, who are the Pharisees?

Lions on the prowl. An unrepentant people determined to be worshipped and to see an end to Christ's gospel. Who is Jesus?

[ 13 : 53 ] The shutter of lions' mouths. He is God incarnate. He is sinless and is calling his enemies to win them for the kingdom. Whether that be the militant enemies like the Pharisees or the passive enemies and the great lost multitude.

These are the protagonists and antagonists in this passage. Now, let's examine the great offer to the Jews, to the Gentiles and to us.

What is Jesus' great call in this passage? Let me draw your eyes to verse 17. Come, for everything is ready.

does this not have echoes of Matthew 11, 28? Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

This is the tapestry of truth that is in the Bible and in the gospel. It's the parable of the great banquet.

[ 15 : 07 ] It's not like going to someone's house today where you, for hospitality, where you think, what is the right gift to bring to show my gratitude if not to meet the basic social expectations of today?

The offer is full. Everything is ready. There is nothing expected but for the receiver to react positively to the offer.

All has been prepared for us by Jesus' death on the cross. Salvation is at hand if the sinner will repent and call on Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

All is done by Christ. We have hope as our salvation is not up to us. but it's up to him.

The great call is to the Jews. This great call come for everything is now ready. God loves his people and has always preserved a remnant for himself throughout what seems dire situations of persecution or exile throughout the Old Testament.

[ 16 : 30 ] this call to the Jews even in this hostile passage should not be a surprise for Paul says in Romans 1 verse 16 for I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes first to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

also note in this passage this is actually the second invitation come for everything is now ready.

The first we see in verse 16 a man once gave a great banquet and invited many. It was customary for two invites to feasts as they took long to prepare.

It's like your modern contemporary save the date. Here though in theological context in the Bible the offer the first invite was to the Jews from God from his very mouth and through Moses and the prophets to love their true living God.

Jesus' ministry was the second invite to repent and to love their God. For the Jews right here this is a triangle sign with red edges.

[ 18 : 09 ] It's a grave and serious warning. It's a red cross over a motorway. You can ignore it for only so long before you run into real and present danger.

this parable isn't a warning of a traffic accident but of greater eternal risk. Risk to their souls and it comes in the words of verse 24.

For I tell you none of those men who are invited shall taste my banquet. throughout the scriptures God's purpose and covenant curses or punishments for not taking part in covenant commitments which the Jews agreed to on multiple occasions was not to crush them or to wipe them out but to bring them to repentance and rely on their God.

Here again Jesus has been clear and severe to give a chance for true repentance. However if they continue to refuse to believe in the Lord till their deaths what faces them is eternity under God's just wrath.

After all time and time and time again Jesus calls them to come. Also for ethnic Jews who read this gospel the hope is that they see Christ for who he is who saves and people turn to him which is why we joyfully support outreach to God's first chosen people as a denomination.

[ 19 : 59 ] It's also a call to the Gentiles. It's said to be one of the Lord's most instructive parables and opening up of the gospel not just to Jews but to Gentiles also.

Who are Gentiles? Anyone who isn't an ethnic Jew. For example I as a Scot I'm not I am a Gentile. It's also important to say God wasn't surprised or had to change his plan due to the faithlessness of some of the Jews.

His opening of the gospel to the Gentiles was always going to happen. God was not and will never be thrown into confusion or diverted like we can.

When in verses 18 through 20 the Jews repeatedly refused the invitation of our Lord what is the response? Verse 21 go out quickly to the streets and the lanes of the city and bring in the poor the crippled and the lame.

Then verse 23 after the servants returning and saying there was still room go out to the highways and the hedges and compel people to come in.

[ 21 : 25 ] Let's note two things. Firstly the highways and hedges or byways in other translations. Speaking of these highways and hedges we're thinking geographically away from the central hub of society alternatively going to all corners or to push it even further to Gentile lands.

Second in verse 23 the servant doesn't return to say the house is full like he does the first time. It's an ongoing call.

It's an open call. A mission that hasn't completed to save souls for Christ. Which is why we as a congregation joined joyously for the recommissioning service of Katrina on Wednesday.

She is going to fight for souls for Christ. It's why Romans verse that we cross-referenced before said to the Jew first then to the Greek.

It's why Peter Peter in Acts 10 after his vision of inclusion of the Gentiles says in Acts 10 34 to 35 truly I understand God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

[ 22 : 48 ] Then in that same chapter in verse 43 he goes on to say everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Note also no one in the passage of the second invitation come for everything is now ready the down and outs those in the highways and the hedges no one is said to refuse no one is said to reject the invitation.

The offer is gratefully received in contrast to the rejection of the first invited guests. Finally I want you to draw your attention to the term compel in verse 23.

Compel doesn't envisage force. It's one servant after all and so would be unable to force anyone but the word compel here is to convince or as I said earlier to woo people towards the offer to come.

We being Gentiles this call is to us. It's a call to you. It's a joy to preach a passage which is so explicit and it's called to come to Christ.

[ 24 : 11 ] It's a joy to know that Christ has made everything ready and we do not have to bring anything to the party and being saved but it's reliant solely on Christ.

What a saviour we have to hope in. One who's the good shepherd. One who spent his whole life serving. Who like an Olympic wrestler wrestles and strains every sinew to contend for his elect.

He is true, speaks truth and doesn't change. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquity.

The punishment that was upon him brought us peace. By his wounds we are healed. What a place to have hope.

Charles Hatton Spurgeon said, though you have changed a thousand times, he has not changed once.

[ 25 : 20 ] To the highways and the hedges, to those who came here driving on the M8, or those that came here driving on the M74, to those that walked up St Vincent Street or St Vincent Lane, hear the call, come, for everything is now ready.

Come. He contends to this day for the Jew, for the Gentile, for you. Will your hope still remain in yourself, in your weakness, or in Christ and in his strength?

Let us ponder the call. Allow me to finally close with the warning from our Lord that was in this parable.

we can quickly disregard this warning, thinking that it doesn't apply to us, as it's for the Pharisees, and we as people aren't ethnic Jews, but we can be Pharisees of the heart.

When I was a teenager, I glibly joked one of the reasons I was a Christian was the banquets in heaven, with a sole desire for people to find me comical.

[ 26 : 37 ] I had none of the wonder, awe, and joy that should have come with such a statement. I thank the Lord for his spirit assisting me to love the Lord more these days than as I was a teen.

We can be glib. Don't be glib in regards to our relationship with the majestic God God. We don't know when the last compelling of the spirit will come, or the warning from his word.

So be compelled whilst you still can. It's like the rearing of a child. You can tell them with dogged repetition to behave and then give a final warning before a punishment.

Here, the loving Lord compel us today. And let us respond in the positive of you. For this is where we find our hope.

And the loving Lord put your hope there. It is sure. It is firm. He went into the lion's den for us.

[ 27 : 53 ] Do not rely on yourself. Have hope solely in the God man, the incarnate God, Jesus Christ. He will never let you go.

Come, for everything is now ready. Amen. And bless that word to us. God .