



Impartial Grace: Answering the Hard Texts

James R. Barnes

Psalm 145:9

Yahweh is good to all men.

www.orchardministry.me



Impartial Grace: Answering the Hard Texts

James R. Barnes

www.orchardministry.me

Impartial Grace: Answering the Hard Texts

Copyright © 2026 by James R. Barnes

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (WEB), which is public domain.

Cover emblem: Impartial Grace — Grace For All. Hope For Every Soul.

Interior illustrations: Orchard table series

First Edition — Answering the Hard Texts

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: [Assign on publication]

James R. Barnes - Orchard, Texas

www.orchardministry.me

Imprint: Impartial Grace / James R. Barnes





*To
God,
Yahweh is good to all men.*

— Psalm 145:9 —

Impartial Grace
Grace For All. Hope For Every Soul.

INTRODUCTION — A DEFENSE, NOT A DEBATE

Impartial Grace: Why I Must Speak



Text: 1 Peter 3:15, Jude 3, Psalm 145:9

I'm 73 years old. I have pastored, I have buried, I have baptized. I have no desire to build a following or win an argument.

But I have a burden.

I believe what Psalm 145:9 says — plainly, simply: 'The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.'

And in these last few years, I have heard that verse explained away. I've heard good men — men I love — use other Scriptures to tell me that God is not good to all in the way that matters most.

So what I am going to do in these next weeks is not attack anyone. I am going to do what 1 Peter 3:15 tells every old man to do: '...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.'

The Greek word for defense is apologia. It's where we get apologetics. It doesn't mean I'm sorry. It means I have a reason, and I must give it.

And Jude 3 says, 'contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.'

I am not contending against my brothers. I am contending for a truth I believe is being lost — that God's grace is impartial. Grace for all. Hope for every soul.

If you have your list — Romans 9, Ephesians 1, John 6, John 10 — keep it open. We are going to let every hard text speak. We are not going to hide one.

But we are going to put every one of those texts under this light: Psalm 145:9.

I. WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY 'IMPARTIAL GRACE' — Three Clarifications

1. I do NOT mean universalism. I do not believe everyone will be saved. The narrow gate is real. Matthew 7:13-14.

2. I do NOT mean man saves himself. We are dead in trespasses. Ephesians 2:1. No one comes unless drawn. John 6:44.

3. I DO mean this: When God acts in salvation, His heart is good to all, His atonement is sufficient for all, His invitation is sincere to all, and His desire is that all would come to repentance. 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16, 1 John 2:2.

Impartial means He does not have two kinds of goodness — a general goodness for the many and a saving goodness only for a few. He is good to all in the same way — the goodness that led Him to give His Son.

The logo you see — the tree with deep roots and shepherd's crooks — that's my theology. The roots go down for all. The shepherds gather for all.

II. WHY I MUST GIVE A DEFENSE — Three Reasons

A. Because the Character of God is at Stake. If God is good to all only in sunshine and rain, but not in the cross, then Psalm 145:9 is not true in the way that matters most.

B. Because the Gospel Invitation Must Be Honest. I stand up on Sunday and say, 'Whosoever will may come.' If Christ did not die for all, is that invitation honest? Can I offer what has not been provided? Impartial Grace lets me preach 'Come' and mean it.

C. Because the Olivet Discourse Demands It. You know my first booklet. Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives and says the Temple will fall and the Gospel will go to all nations. Matthew 24:14. The end is not about God narrowing His grace. It's about God widening His table.

III. HOW WE WILL DO THIS — Our Rules of Engagement

Write these down. This is how we will handle the hard verses:

1. We will read them in context. 20 verses, not 1 verse. No proof-texting.

2. We will read them under Psalm 145:9, not over it. If my interpretation of Romans 9 makes Psalm 145:9 untrue, my interpretation is wrong, not the Psalm.

3. We will end at Jesus, not at logic. The Bible is not a puzzle to solve, but a Person to behold. John 5:39-40.

Conclusion — The Table:

I told you in the last booklet about the path that leads to three crosses. That path didn't lead to a courtroom where God chooses some chairs and removes others.

It led to a table. A table in the middle of an orchard.

And the invitation nailed to that table says what it has always said: Grace for all. Hope for every soul.

That's what I believe. That's my defense. And for the next nine weeks, if you'll let me, I want to show you why I believe the Bible teaches it.

Let's pray.

SERMON 1 — JACOB I LOVED, ESAU I HATED

Romans 9:13

Text: Romans 9:6-16, Malachi 1:2-3, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: Election is for service, not exclusion from goodness.

INTRODUCTION — The Verse That Stops Us Cold

Open your Bible to Romans 9:13. Paul writes: 'As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'

If Psalm 145:9 says 'The LORD is good to all,' how do we read this? Many a young preacher has closed his Bible here. Many a mother has wept here — 'Does God hate some?'

I want to make a defense today, with gentleness and respect. I believe Romans 9:13 does not teach that God hates Esau the man from eternity. It teaches that God chose Jacob the man for a purpose.

To see it, we must read what Paul quotes — Malachi 1:2-3 — and who those two boys were.

I. WHO WERE THEY? Two Boys, Two Nations

Read Genesis 25:21-26. Rebekah is barren, Isaac prays, twins struggle within her. God says: 'Two nations are in your womb.'

This is crucial. God is not talking about two individual babies headed for heaven or hell. He is talking about two nations — Israel and Edom — and which line will carry the Seed, the Messiah.

Malachi 1:2-3 was written 1,000 years after Jacob and Esau died. Malachi looks back and says: 'I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have made his hill country a desolation.'

What does Malachi mean? God is speaking as a covenant Lord. He chose Israel to carry the promise, and He judged Edom for their violence against their brother (Obadiah 10-12). In Hebrew idiom, 'love and hate' is language of choice for service. Compare Luke 14:26 — 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother...' Does Jesus command literal hatred? No. He means choose Me first.

Jacob I loved — I chose you to carry the Seed. Esau I hated — I did not choose you for that service. This is election for service, not election for salvation.

II. WHAT DID GOD CHOOSE THEM FOR? The Seed, Not Salvation

Read Romans 9:6-9 carefully: 'For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel... it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise.'

Paul's point in Romans 9 is not 'God picks some to go to heaven and some to go to hell.' His point is: 'Has God's word failed because most of Israel rejected Messiah? No, because God's promise always came through a chosen line.'

Genesis 12:3 — Through Abraham's Seed, all families of the earth will be blessed. The Seed matters.

Jacob was chosen to be the great-grandfather of Jesus. Esau was not. Does that mean God was not good to Esau?

Look at Esau's life:

1. Genesis 25:28 — Isaac loved Esau. God gave him a father's love.
2. Genesis 33:9 — God made Esau wealthy: 'I have enough, my brother.'
3. Genesis 36 — God gave Esau a nation, a land, a lineage — Edom. He protected his borders (Deuteronomy 2:5).
4. Hebrews 11 — Esau is not listed among those who refused grace. He is listed as a man who traded a birthright, but God still dealt with him.

The LORD was good to Esau. Psalm 145:9 is still true in Genesis 36. God's goodness to Esau was not saving goodness for carrying the Messiah, but it was real goodness — provision, protection, place.

Jacob chosen to carry the Seed is not Esau rejected from mercy.

III. WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR IMPARTIAL GRACE?

Because if Romans 9:13 is about eternal hatred, then Psalm 145:9 cannot be true in the way that matters. But if Romans 9:13 is about elective service — God choosing one vessel to carry the water of life to all — then Psalm 145:9 stands firm.

Picture my figurative orchard. I have many trees, but I choose one tree to graft a new variety onto so that variety can spread to every tree. My choice of one is for the good of all.

That is election. 'Jacob I loved' — I chose you to carry My promise so that through you, I could be good to all.

Romans 9:15 — 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.' Paul quotes Exodus 33:19. When does God say that? After the golden calf! Israel deserves judgment, and God says, 'I will be merciful anyway.' The context is not God withholding mercy, but God lavishing mercy when Israel deserves none.

And Romans 9:16 — 'So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.' Who gets mercy? The point is God does the giving, not man the earning. Not — God gives mercy only to a few.

CONCLUSION — At the Table

I close where we started. The table in the orchard.

If Jacob I loved means God arbitrarily hates Esau before he is born, that table is small. Only Jacobs may sit. Esaus may not even smell the bread.

But if Jacob I loved means 'I chose you to carry the bread so Esaus can eat too,' then the table is large. Grace for all. Hope for every soul.

Genesis 28:14 — God tells Jacob: 'In you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

Election is not the narrowing of God's goodness. It is the channel of His goodness to all.

Let's pray: Father, thank You that You are good to all. Thank You that You chose Jacob to carry the Seed that would become Jesus, who died for the world. Help us not to read hatred where You intended service. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read Malachi 1:1-5 in context. Is God talking about two babies or two nations 1,000 years later?
2. Read Luke 14:26. How does 'hate' function as choice language in Hebrew idiom?
3. Read Genesis 36 and Deuteronomy 2:5. Was God good to Esau and Edom in real, earthly ways?

SERMON 2 — VESSELS OF WRATH

Romans 9:21-23

Text: Romans 9:19-24, Jeremiah 18:1-10, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: The Potter can make a vessel for destruction — but He is patient, not partial. God endures the vessel, He doesn't enjoy its ruin.

INTRODUCTION — The Hardest Wheel

Read Romans 9:21-23: 'Has the potter no right over the clay... What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy?'

This text is often used to say God creates some people for hell, for His glory. That He delights in their destruction.

I want to make a defense. I believe Romans 9 does not teach that God makes men in order to damn them. It teaches that God is patient with men who make themselves vessels of wrath, so that He might still show mercy.

To understand Paul, we must go to the Potter's house — Jeremiah 18.

I. GO TO THE POTTER'S HOUSE — Jeremiah 18:1-10

God tells Jeremiah: 'Arise, and go down to the potter's house.' He goes, and the potter is working at his wheel. The vessel he was making was spoiled in his hand, and he reworked it into another vessel as it seemed good to him.

Notice: The clay is spoiled, but not discarded. The Potter does not throw it away. He remakes it.

Then God explains: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.'

And verses 7-10 are the key we often skip: If a nation I have threatened repents, I will relent of the disaster. If a nation I have promised good does evil, I will relent of the good.

The Potter is sovereign, but not fatalistic. The clay's response matters. The vessel's future is not fixed irrespective of repentance.

Paul knew Jeremiah 18. He was a rabbi. When he uses Potter and clay in Romans 9, he is not inventing a new idea that God creates disposable people. He is quoting the Potter who waits and reworks.

II. WHAT DOES ROMANS 9:22 REALLY SAY? Endured With Much Patience

Read the grammar slowly: 'What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction...'

Three observations:

1. Who prepares the vessel for destruction? The text says 'prepared' — *katartizo* — perfect participle. Who is the actor? In Greek, this is middle voice leaning passive. In Jeremiah 18, the clay spoils itself. In 2 Timothy 2:20-21, Paul says: 'If anyone cleanses himself... he will be a vessel for honorable use.' The vessel has a part. Vessels of wrath prepare themselves by persistent unbelief. God does not prepare them FOR wrath; He endures them IN wrath.

2. What does God do with them? He endures them with much patience — *makrothumia*. Great, long-burning patience. This is the same word Peter uses in 2 Peter 3:9 — 'The Lord is... patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish.' And 3:15 — 'Count the patience of our Lord as salvation.'

If God made Pharaoh and Esau only for hell, why does He need patience with them? Patience is only needed if you are giving someone time to repent.

Pharaoh is Paul's example in 9:17. 'For this very purpose I have raised you up.' Read Exodus. God did not make Pharaoh hard-hearted from the womb. Exodus 8:15 says Pharaoh hardened his own heart first. God then confirmed his choice, using Pharaoh's hardness to deliver Israel — and to show even Egyptians His power so that some Egyptians might believe (Exodus 12:38 — a mixed multitude left Egypt).

3. Why does He endure them? 'In order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy.' The patience with vessels of wrath becomes the stage for mercy.

God does not need evil to look good. He is patient with evil so that mercy has time to shine.

III. UNDER PSALM 145:9 — He Is Good To All, Even Vessels of Wrath

Hold Romans 9 under Psalm 145:9: 'The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.'

Is God good to vessels of wrath?

Yes — because He endures them. He gives them breath (Acts 17:25). He gives them sunshine and rain (Matthew 5:45). He gives them time (Romans 2:4 — His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance). He gives them a gospel that is offered (John 3:16).

Ezekiel 33:11 says: 'As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.'

Lamentations 3:33: 'For he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men.'

God can make a vessel for destruction in the sense that He has the right to judge persistent, self-hardened unbelief. But the Bible never says He enjoys its ruin. He endures it.

The hook for this sermon: God endures the vessel, He doesn't enjoy its ruin.

CONCLUSION — The Wheel Still Turns

In my garage office, I have a little ceramic clay pot that resembles an old Houston Oiler helmet. It's lopsided and the team doesn't exist any longer. Spoiled, like Jeremiah says. But I didn't throw it away. It's on my shelf. I reworked its purpose — now it holds pens.

That is what the Potter does.

The question Romans 9 asks is not 'Are you a chosen vessel or a wrath vessel from eternity?' The question is, 'Will you be cleansed and become a vessel of mercy today?' 2 Timothy 2:21.

The wheel is still turning. The Potter is still patient. And His goodness is still over all that He has made — even over vessels who have prepared themselves for destruction — giving them breath, time, and a sincere offer of mercy.

Grace for all. Hope for every soul.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read Jeremiah 18:1-10 slowly. What determines if God relents of judgment or good? Does the clay have a response?

2. Read Exodus 7-10. Who hardens Pharaoh's heart first — Pharaoh or God? Count the times.

3. Read Romans 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, 15. What is the purpose of God's patience toward sinners?

SERMON 3 — CHOSEN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION

Ephesians 1:4-5

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14, 2 Peter 3:9, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: Chosen in Christ means chosen for holiness, not chosen instead of others. In Christ, all who believe are included.

INTRODUCTION — Before You Were Born

Ephesians 1:4-5 — 'even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ...'

This is perhaps the sweetest passage in the Bible, and yet for many it feels like the hardest. 'Chosen before the foundation.' Does that mean God chose me and not my neighbor before either of us was born?

I want to flip the lens — not to deny election, but to locate it where Paul locates it: In Christ.

I. WHERE ARE WE CHOSEN? In Christ, Not Outside Him

Read Ephesians 1:3-4 slowly: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing... even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.'

Notice the location three times in verse 3-4: in Christ, in Christ, in him. Paul does not say 'God chose some individuals to be placed into Christ.' He says 'God chose us in Christ.'

The plan before the foundation was not a list of names outside of Jesus. The plan was Christ Himself — and all who are found in Him are chosen.

Picture a ship. Before the foundation of the world, God chose the Ship — Christ — to sail to glory, and He decreed that all who board the Ship will be holy and blameless. You are not chosen to get on the Ship. You are chosen because you are on the Ship.

Ephesians 1:7 — 'In him we have redemption.' 1:11 — 'In him we have obtained an inheritance.' 1:13 — 'In him you also, when you heard... and believed... were sealed.'

How do you get 'in him'? Verse 13 — you hear the gospel, you believe, you are sealed. The choosing is corporate and in Christ, the entering is personal and by faith.

II. WHAT ARE WE CHOSEN FOR? For Holiness, Not Instead Of Others

Look at the purpose clause in verse 4: 'that we should be holy and blameless before him.'

Election's goal is not contrast — 'I chose you instead of them.' Election's goal is character — 'I chose you to be holy.'

Verse 5: 'He predestined us for adoption.' Predestination is not about who gets to heaven versus hell. It is about what happens to those who are in Christ: they are destined for adoption, for sonship, for full inheritance.

I am an adopted man, Jim Barnes. My earthly adoption papers said I would receive my father's name and his property. Predestination says the same: if you are in Christ, your future is sealed — adoption, not orphanhood. Holiness, not guilt.

If God predestines individuals to hell before birth, then 2 Peter 3:9 cannot be true: 'The Lord is... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.' And Psalm 145:9 cannot be true: 'The LORD is good to all.'

How can God genuinely not wish that any perish if He has already chosen that any must perish?

But if predestination is God's decree that all who are in Christ will be made holy and adopted, then both texts sing together. He is good to all, offering Christ to all, and He destines all who are in Christ to be like Christ.

III. WHO IS INCLUDED? All Who Believe

The greatest word in Ephesians 1 is 'us.' Who is 'us'? Paul defines it in verse 1: 'to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus.'

'Us' is not a secret list in heaven. 'Us' is faithful in Christ Jesus on earth.

Ephesians 1:13 shows the order: heard, believed, sealed. Not sealed, then believe.

This is Impartial Grace: Before the foundation, God chose Christ. And in Christ, He chose a people to be holy. And to that people, He says, 'Whosoever will may come.' When you come, you discover you were chosen in Him all along.

As Spurgeon said, 'Go and preach the gospel to every creature. If you do, and they believe, you need not be in any doubt about their election.'

CONCLUSION — The Orchard Before Time

Before God planted any tree in any orchard, before He laid any foundation, He planted Christ. And He said, 'All who are in My Son will be holy. All who are in My Son will be adopted.'

The table was set before time. The invitation was written before time: Grace for all. Hope for every soul — in Christ.

Ephesians 1:6 — 'to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.' His grace is glorious precisely because it is not partial. It is in the Beloved, offered to all, enjoyed by all who believe.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Count how many times 'in Christ,' 'in him,' 'in the Beloved' appears in Ephesians 1:3-14. What does location matter?
2. Read Ephesians 1:4 purpose clause 'that we should be holy.' Is election about who vs. whom, or about what we become?
3. How does 2 Peter 3:9 help you read Ephesians 1:4-5 under Psalm 145:9?

SERMON 4 — ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES ME

John 6:37-44

Text: John 6:35-44, John 12:32, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: The Father's giving is His drawing — and He draws all. No one can come unless drawn, and Jesus said, I will draw all men.

INTRODUCTION — The Rope

Read John 6:37 — 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.' And John 6:44 — 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.'

These are some of the most precious and most misused verses in John. Precious, because they promise that Jesus will never cast out anyone who comes. Misused, because they are often read to say the Father only gives a few to the Son, and only a few are drawn.

I want to show you today that the Father's giving is His drawing, and His drawing is wide.

I. NO ONE CAN COME UNLESS DRAWN — John 6:44

Jesus is clear: dead men don't come on their own. Ephesians 2:1 — dead in trespasses. John 3:19 — men love darkness. So how does anyone come?

The Father must draw him. The word draw — *helkuo* — is a strong word. It means to pull, to drag, as with a net full of fish (John 21:6, 11), or as with a sword from a sheath. It is not a gentle suggestion. It is sovereign enablement.

I believe that. No one saves himself. Impartial Grace is not Arminian self-salvation. We must be drawn.

The question is not **WHETHER** we must be drawn, but **HOW MANY** are drawn.

II. I WILL DRAW ALL — John 12:32

Six chapters later, Jesus says it plainly: John 12:32 — 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

Same author. Same Gospel. Same word — *helkuo* — draw. In John 6, the Father draws. In John 12, the Son draws. Same drawing.

What is 'all'? In Greek, *pantas* — all people. Not all kinds of people, not just elect people. John 1:7 says Jesus came so that all might believe through Him. John 3:16 — whosoever believes. John 3:17 — the world might be saved through Him.

When Jesus is lifted up — on the cross, in resurrection, in preaching — He draws all.

Some say 'all' means all kinds. But John's use won't let us shrink it. John 12:19 — the Pharisees say 'Look, the world has gone after him.' They meant all. John uses hyperbole for all. And John 12:32 answers that hyperbole with truth: Yes, I will draw all.

If John 6:44 says 'No one can come unless drawn' and John 12:32 says 'I will draw all,' then the conclusion is not 'Only some are drawn.' The conclusion is 'All are drawn so that all may come.'

Drawing is not irresistible regeneration. Drawing is enablement. It is God opening the blind eyes enough to see the cross and giving the dead will a genuine choice. Some drawn will refuse (John 5:40 — 'you refuse to come to me that you may have life'). But no one can say 'I was never drawn.'

III. ALL THAT THE FATHER GIVES ME WILL COME — John 6:37

Now back to 6:37: 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.'

Who does the Father give? Those whom He draws.

And whom does He draw? All.

Does that mean all will come? No. Because John 6:36 says just before: 'But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.' Drawing can be resisted. The same sun that melts wax hardens clay.

But notice the second half of 6:37 — the promise that guards Impartial Grace: 'whoever comes to me I will never cast out.' Whoever. Not 'the elect whoever' but whoever. The invitation is impartial.

Put it under Psalm 145:9: 'The LORD is good to all.' How is He good to all in John 6? By drawing all. By giving all the rope to come. Not forcing, but truly enabling.

John 6:40 seals it: 'For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life.' This is the will — everyone who looks. Not just some who are given sight.

CONCLUSION — The Table With a Rope

In my figurative orchard, when a sheep falls in the ditch, I don't wait to see if it's an elect sheep. I throw the rope to all. Some grab it. Some don't. But the rope is for all.

The Father throws the rope — He draws. The Son is lifted up and draws all. And all who grab the rope — all that the Father gives through drawing — will come, and Jesus will never cast out a single one who comes.

Your line for this week, church: No one can come unless drawn, and Jesus said, I will draw all men.

That's Impartial Grace. Grace for all. Hope for every soul, because the drawing is for every soul.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Compare John 6:44 and John 12:32. Same Greek verb *helkuo*? Same author? What does John mean by 'draw all'?
2. Read John 5:40. Can those who are drawn refuse to come?
3. Read Psalm 145:9 under John 6:37. How is never casting out 'whoever comes' a proof that God is good to all?

SERMON 5 — YOU ARE NOT MY SHEEP

John 10:11, 26

Text: John 10:1-30, Psalm 23, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: Not my sheep yet — the Shepherd has other sheep He must bring. Ends at John 10:16 'other sheep... one flock.'

INTRODUCTION — The Hardest Words From the Shepherd

Read John 10:26 — Jesus says to the Pharisees: 'but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.'

Many hear that and say, 'See? Some people are just not His sheep from eternity. He doesn't die for them.'

But we must read John 10 as Jesus tells it, not as a system tells it. Keep reading four verses to John 10:16 — 'And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.'

The story of John 10 is not 'You are not sheep, so you can never be sheep.' The story is 'You are not my sheep YET — and I have other sheep I must bring.'

I. WHO ARE HIS SHEEP? Those Who Hear and Follow

John 10 defines sheep by response, not by a secret decree.

John 10:3-4 — 'The sheep hear his voice... and the sheep follow him.' John 10:27 — 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.'

Sheep are known by hearing and following. That is present tense, relational.

Psalms 23 — 'The LORD is my shepherd.' David was not a sheep from eternity. He became the LORD's sheep because he trusted the Shepherd.

When Jesus says in 10:26 'you do not believe because you are not among my sheep,' He is not saying 'You cannot believe because you are not elect.' He is saying 'The reason you do not believe is because you are not living as my sheep — you do not hear, you do not follow.' The unbelief proves the alienation; the alienation does not cause the unbelief in a fatalistic sense.

Notice the context: John 10:25 — 'The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me.' They had evidence. They refused it. John 10:38 — 'though you do not believe me, believe the works.' Jesus still calls them to believe.

Would a Shepherd who only died for some invite non-sheep to believe His works?

II. OTHER SHEEP I MUST BRING — John 10:16

This is the verse that unlocks the chapter. 'I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also.'

Who are the other sheep? At that moment, they are Gentiles — you and me — not in the Jewish fold. But also, in the flow of John, they are anyone who is not yet following but will.

The word 'must' — *dei* — divine necessity. I MUST bring them. Not 'I might if they are elect.' I must. It is My mission.

How does He bring them? By laying down His life. Read John 10:11, 15, 17-18 — four times Jesus says 'I lay down my life for the sheep.' The atonement is the Shepherd's death for the flock.

Does He lay down His life only for current sheep, or also for other sheep He must bring? Verse 16 answers: He lays it down so that other sheep can become one flock.

If He only died for current sheep, there could be no other sheep ever brought. But He says there will be one flock, one shepherd. His death creates the possibility for other sheep to become His sheep.

Put under Psalm 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.' Is the Good Shepherd good to non-sheep? Yes — He lays down His life so that non-sheep can become sheep.

III. YOU ARE NOT MY SHEEP — YET

Let me re-preach John 10:26 with pastoral tenderness:

When Jesus says 'you are not among my sheep' to the Pharisees, He is holding up a mirror: 'You are not hearing, you are not following. You are acting like goats who refuse the Shepherd. But I have other sheep, and I am still gathering.'

The proof? Many Pharisees later did believe. Acts 6:7 — 'a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.' Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea — were they sheep in John 10? No. Did they become sheep? Yes.

John 10:26 is a description of their present state, not a decree of their eternal destiny.

John 10:16 is the promise of their possible future: 'They will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.'

The Shepherd does not say 'You will never be My sheep.' He says 'You are not My sheep' — and then goes to die so you can become one.

CONCLUSION — One Flock, One Shepherd

I have a little flock in my figurative orchard — a few sheep who know my voice. When I call, they come. But sometimes a neighbor's sheep gets through the fence. Is it my sheep? Not yet. Do I shoot it? No. I feed it. I lead it. I bring it in. It becomes my sheep.

That is John 10:16.

Jesus ends not with exclusion — 'You are not my sheep, goodbye' — but with expansion — 'I have other sheep... one flock.'

The Shepherd who says 'You are not my sheep' in verse 26 is the same Shepherd who says 'I lay down my life for the sheep' in verse 11, and the same Shepherd who died on Calvary with arms open, drawing all men (John 12:32).

Impartial Grace: He is good to all — even to those who are not yet His sheep — by laying down His life so they can become His sheep.

Grace for all. Hope for every soul. Even for those who are not yet in the fold.

Let's pray.

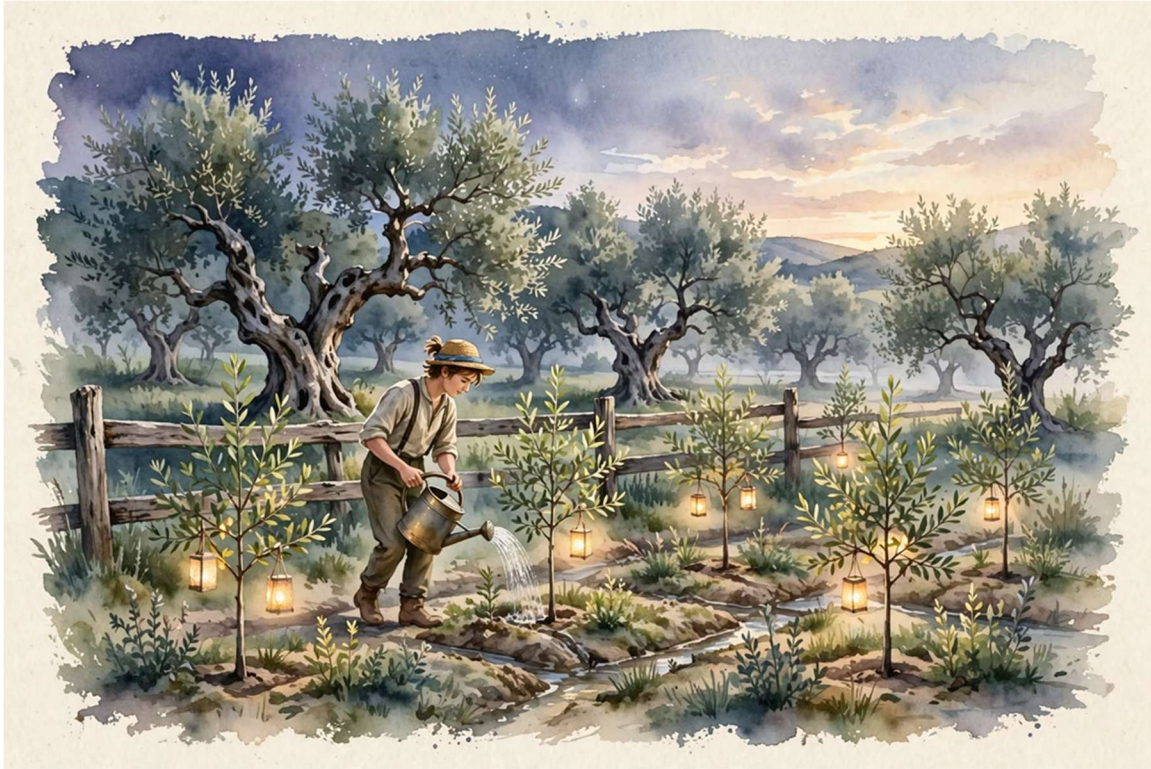
For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read John 10:1-30 straight through. How does Jesus define sheep — by decree or by hearing and following?
2. Read John 10:16 and Acts 6:7. Who are 'other sheep' and can 'not my sheep' become sheep later?
3. Hold John 10:11 under Psalm 145:9. How is laying down His life for the sheep good to those who are not yet sheep?

SERMON 6 — I PRAY NOT FOR THE WORLD

John 17:9

Text: John 17:1-26, 1 Timothy 2:1-6, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: That night He prayed for His apostles — three hours later He died for the world. Intercession is specific, atonement is expansive.

INTRODUCTION — The Upper Room Prayer

Read John 17:9 — 'I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.'

This verse is often taken to say: See, Jesus doesn't even pray for the world. So He surely didn't die for the world.

But we must read John 17 in its hour. Where is Jesus? He is in the Upper Room, hours before Gethsemane, praying for His eleven apostles¹. And we must read John 17 next to

¹ FOOTNOTE — Who is missing in the Upper Room?

The Upper Room narrative says Jesus prayed for the Eleven. Who is missing? Judas Iscariot. John 13:26-30: 'After receiving the morsel, he immediately went out. And it was night.' All of John 14-17 occurs after Judas has left. John 17:12 confirms this: 'not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.' Thus Jesus' specific prayer in John 17:6-19 is for the faithful Eleven who remained to carry the gospel. The one who chose the night is not among 'those you have given me out of the world' in that hour — which makes Luke 23:34 three hours later all the more expansive: on the cross He prays, 'Father, forgive them,' for the very world that includes Judases.

what He does three hours later — and what He says in the same prayer twenty minutes later.

I. WHAT IS HE PRAYING THAT NIGHT? For His Apostles — John 17:6-19

John 17 is structured in three circles:

Circle 1: Jesus prays for Himself (17:1-5) — glorify Me so I can go to the cross.

Circle 2: Jesus prays for His apostles — 'those whom you have given me' (17:6-19).

These are the eleven. Verse 6 — 'I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.' Verse 12 — 'While I was with them, I kept them in your name.' This is apostolic, eyewitness language.

Circle 3: Jesus prays for all future believers — 'I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word' (17:20).

When Jesus says in 17:9 'I am not praying for the world,' He does not mean 'I never pray for the world.' He means 'Right now, in this moment, I am focused on these eleven men who must carry the gospel after I leave.'

It is like a father before surgery. He prays for his surgical team. Does that mean he doesn't love his family? No. It means this prayer is specific to the task at hand.

John 17:9 is specific intercession for the apostles' preservation: 'Keep them in your name' (17:11), 'keep them from the evil one' (17:15), 'Sanctify them in the truth' (17:17).

He is not praying for the world's sanctification for apostolic mission. He is praying for the apostles' sanctification for apostolic mission.

II. WHAT DOES HE PRAY TWENTY MINUTES LATER? For the World — John 17:20-23

Read John 17:20-21 — 'I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'

Now the circle widens. He prays for us — future believers. And what is the purpose? 'So that the world may believe.'

Verse 23 — 'so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.'

Jesus does pray for the world — that the world may believe, that the world may know. His prayer in 17:9 is not 'I never pray for the world.' It is 'This first part is for My apostles. The next part is for the world to believe through them.'

Intercession in John 17 is specific and sequential. It starts narrow and widens.

III. WHAT DOES HE DO THREE HOURS LATER? He Dies for the World — 1 Timothy 2:1-6

Here is your pastoral punch, church:

That night He prayed for His apostles. Three hours later He died for the world.

John 18-19 moves from Upper Room to Gethsemane to Golgotha. In the Upper Room, He prays for eleven. On Golgotha, He prays, 'Father, forgive them' (Luke 23:34) — for the very world that crucified Him.

1 Timothy 2:1-6 — Paul commands us to pray 'for all people' (v1), 'for kings and all who are in high positions' (v2), and gives the reason: 'This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all' (v3-6).

Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all — the same 'all people' God desires to be saved. His intercession in John 17:9 is specific; His atonement in 1 Timothy 2:6 is expansive. Put it under Psalm 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all.' How is He good to the world if He does not pray for it in John 17:9? He is good because twenty minutes later He prays that the world may believe (17:21), and three hours later He dies as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:6).

Hebrews 7:25 says He ever lives to make intercession for us. Whose intercession? Romans 8:32 — 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.' If He gave Him up for us all, He intercedes for us all who come.

Intercession is specific — He prays for His apostles to keep them. Atonement is expansive — He dies for the world to save them.

CONCLUSION — The Orchard at Night and Morning

Figuratively speaking, in my orchard, at night I walk the rows and check the youngest trees — the ones just grafted. I water them specifically. I stake them specifically. I do not water every tree that night. Does that mean I don't care for the whole orchard? No. It means tonight's work is specific.

In the morning, I open the irrigation for the whole orchard. All drink.

That is John 17 to the cross.

That night — specific watering — 'I pray for them, the apostles.'

That morning — whole orchard irrigation — 'who gave himself as a ransom for all.'

The Shepherd who says 'I pray not for the world' in the Upper Room is the same Shepherd who says from the cross, 'Father, forgive them,' and who says from heaven, 'I desire all people to be saved.'

Impartial Grace: His prayers are specific, His mercy is over all He has made.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read John 17:1-26 and note the three circles: Himself (1-5), apostles (6-19), all future believers and the world (20-23). Where does 'I pray not for the world' sit?
2. Read Luke 23:34. Does Jesus pray for the world three hours later?
3. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6. What is the link between 'desires all people to be saved' and 'ransom for all'?

SERMON 7 — APPOINTED TO ETERNAL LIFE

Acts 13:48

Text: Acts 13:42-52, Acts 13:46, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: Appointed because they aligned — the verb is in the middle voice. They positioned themselves to hear, not were pre-programmed.

INTRODUCTION — A Verse That Has Divided Many

Read Acts 13:48 — 'And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.'

If you have ever had someone tell you, 'See, some are appointed to believe and some are appointed not to,' they were quoting this verse. On the surface, it sounds like predestination to belief.

But Luke is a careful historian, and a careful grammarian. And the context — Acts 13:46 — tells us what Luke means.

I. THE CONTEXT: JEWS WHO PUSHED THEMSELVES AWAY — Acts 13:46

Acts 13:46 — Paul and Barnabas speak boldly: 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'

Notice Luke's language for the Jews who did NOT believe: 'you thrust it aside' — apotheo — you pushed it away. 'You judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.'

Who made them unworthy? They did. By their own action of thrusting aside the word. God did not judge them unworthy; they judged themselves unworthy.

Luke is showing us two groups in Antioch of Pisidia:

Group 1: Jews who thrust aside the word and judge themselves unworthy.

Group 2: Gentiles who hear, rejoice, glorify the word, and align themselves for eternal life.

Same verb family — but one pushes away, one positions toward.

II. THE GRAMMAR: TETAGMENOI — IN THE MIDDLE VOICE

Acts 13:48 — 'as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.' The word appointed is tetagmenoi — perfect passive participle of tasso — to arrange, to order, to position, to appoint.

English Bibles render it passive — 'were appointed.' But Greek scholars note that tasso in the middle/passive form often carries middle voice sense — they arranged themselves, they positioned themselves, they aligned themselves.

It is like a soldier who 'was enlisted' — but in middle voice, he enlisted himself. He positioned himself in the line.

We have examples of tasso in the New Testament and in extra-biblical Greek where middle voice means to devote oneself, to arrange oneself.

The great lexicon — BDAG — notes that tetagmenoi here can mean 'belonging to, or aligned for.'

Even if we take it as passive, the question is: Appointed by whom? By God decreeing from eternity who would believe? Or appointed by their own alignment in that moment?

Verse 46 answers it. The Jews appointed themselves as unworthy by thrusting aside. The Gentiles appointed themselves to eternal life by rejoicing, glorifying the word, and believing. It is symmetrical.

I. Howard Marshall, F.F. Bruce, and many others have noted: Luke is not teaching eternal predestination here; Luke is teaching human response. Those who positioned themselves to hear, believed.

III. THE ORCHARD PICTURE: POSITIONING THE CHAIR

In my orchard, I have an old teaching table. When folks come to hear, some pull their chair close, lean in, open their notebook. Some push their chair back, cross their arms, get up and leave.

Who appointed them to hear? They did — by positioning.

Acts 13:44 — 'The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word.' Why? Because the Gentiles had begged in 13:42 — 'they were begging that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.' They wanted to hear. They positioned themselves.

Acts 13:48 — they rejoiced, they glorified the word — present tenses, active responses — and as many as were aligned to eternal life believed.

They were not pre-programmed robots. They were hungry Gentiles who positioned themselves to hear.

Put it under Psalm 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all.' If He is good to all, He does not pre-program some to be unable to believe. He opens the door to all. The Jews in Antioch judged themselves unworthy — He didn't. The Gentiles aligned themselves to eternal life — He welcomed them.

CONCLUSION — The Door Is Open, The Chair Is Positioned

Luke's point is not 'Only appointed people believe.' Luke's point is 'When you position yourself to hear, you will believe.'

The invitation of Acts 13 is impartial. The gospel was spoken first to the Jews. When they thrust it aside, it went to the Gentiles. And the Gentiles who begged, who gathered, who aligned, who positioned themselves — they believed.

Impartial Grace: God does not appoint some to be unable. He lets you judge yourself unworthy if you push away, and He lets you align yourself to eternal life if you lean in.

Grace for all. Hope for every soul. Because the appointment happens not in a secret decree before time, but in the moment you pull your chair close to hear the word.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read Acts 13:42-52. Compare verse 46 'judge yourselves unworthy' with verse 48 'appointed to eternal life.' Who does the appointing in each?
2. Look up tasso in a concordance. Where else does it mean 'arrange, position, devote oneself'?
3. Under Psalm 145:9, how does 'good to all' fit with 'as many as were aligned believed'?

SERMON 8 — MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN

Matthew 22:14

Text: Matthew 22:1-14, Matthew 28:19, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: The call is wide, the garment is Christ — many refuse the garment. No one is turned away for lack of invitation.

INTRODUCTION — The Wedding That Almost Didn't Happen

Read Matthew 22:1-10 — A king gives a wedding feast for his son. He sends servants to call those invited — they refuse. Some kill the servants. The king is angry. Then he says: 'Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And the servants went out and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled.

Then comes the hard verse — Matthew 22:14 — 'For many are called, but few are chosen.'

This verse is often read as: God calls many with a fake call, but chooses only a few to really save. That makes God insincere — calling people He never intends to include.

But the parable itself tells us what 'called' and 'chosen' mean.

I. MANY ARE CALLED — The Invitation is Wide — Matthew 22:9

Matthew 22:9 — 'Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'

The Greek is *hosous ean heurete* — as many as you find, as many as ever you find. No filter.

First call: to the original invited (Israel). They refuse.

Second call: to as many as you find on the main roads — the highways, the hedges. Bad and good. Matthew 22:10 — 'both bad and good' — *kakous kai agathous* — morally mixed. The call is impartial.

This is exactly Matthew 28:19 — 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.' Not some nations, all nations. *Panta ta ethne*.

The call is wide because the King wants His hall filled. He is not trying to keep people out. He is trying to bring people in.

Put it under Psalm 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all.' How is He good to all in Matthew 22? He calls as many as are found.

II. FEW ARE CHOSEN — Because Many Refuse the Garment — Matthew 22:11-13

Read Matthew 22:11 — 'But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.'

This is the pivot. Everyone is called. Everyone may come. But you must come in the garment.

What is the garment? Throughout Scripture, wedding garments are righteousness. Revelation 19:8 — 'it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.' Isaiah 61:10 — 'he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.'

In Christ — Romans 13:14 — 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' Galatians 3:27 — 'as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.'

The garment is Christ — His righteousness, given freely, but it must be put on.

The man without the garment in Matthew 22:11 is not turned away for lack of invitation. He is turned away for refusal of the provision. The King says (22:12) — 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.'

Why speechless? Because the garment was provided. In ancient near-eastern weddings, the king provided wedding garments at the door. To enter without it is to insultingly refuse the King's provision. You say, 'My clothes are good enough. I don't need Yours.'

That is why many are called but few are chosen. Not because few are invited, but because few accept the garment.

Many hear the call — bad and good — but many refuse to put on Christ. They want the feast without the King. The wedding without the Son.

III. NO ONE TURNED AWAY FOR LACK OF INVITATION

Here is your ending, church: At the wedding, no one is turned away for lack of invitation.

Matthew 22:10 — the hall was filled with as many as they found. The King's desire is fullness.

The only one turned away is the one who refuses the garment. He is not speechless because he never got an invitation. He is speechless because he refused the King's robe.

Matthew 22:14 — 'For many are called, but few are chosen' — does not mean 'Many get a fake call, few get a real election.' It means 'Many hear the impartial call of Impartial Grace, but few choose to be clothed in Christ.'

The Greek *eklektoi* — chosen — is the same as those who are clothed. Chosen because they are in the garment. The garment makes them chosen.

John 3:16 — whosoever believes — must put on Christ to be chosen for the feast.

Impartial Grace: The call is wide — as many as you find. The garment is Christ — free for all. Many refuse the garment. But no one at the door can say, 'I never got an invitation.'

CONCLUSION — The Orchard Wedding Table

In my figurative orchard, when I throw a feast for my grandchildren, I invite everyone on the lane. Bad and good, old and young. I set out chairs for as many as I find.

And at the door, I have white jackets — little wedding garments for the children. I say, 'Put this on, come to the table.'

Some put it on with joy. Some say, 'I don't need your jacket. My shirt is fine.' They insult the host.

I don't turn away anyone for lack of invitation. I turn away no one who wears the garment. But if you refuse the garment I provide, you cannot sit at my Son's table.

Many called — wide call to all. Few chosen — because few put on Christ.

Grace for all. Hope for every soul. The hall will be filled, and the garment is free.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read Matthew 22:1-14. Who is invited in verse 9? What kind of people come in verse 10? Who is turned away in verse 11-13 and why?
2. Read Revelation 19:7-8 and Romans 13:14. What is the wedding garment?

3. Under Psalm 145:9, how does 'as many as you find' prove God is good to all?

SERMON 9 — THE NARROW GATE

Matthew 7:13-14

Text: Matthew 7:13-27, Psalm 145:9, Luke 13:24-29



Big Idea: Narrow is the way, but wide is the goodness that invites all to enter it.

INTRODUCTION — Two Gates, Two Roads, One Invitation

Read Matthew 7:13-14 — 'Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.'

Many hear this and say, 'See? God only made a narrow gate for a few. Most people cannot enter. God made the way hard to keep people out.'

But Jesus says 'Enter' — imperative. It is a command to all who hear. He would not command you to enter a gate you cannot enter.

And Luke 13:24-29 — parallel teaching — shows us the heart of the narrow gate. Let's walk through it.

I. NARROW IS THE WAY — What Makes It Narrow?

Matthew 7:14 — narrow is the gate, hard is the way.

What makes it narrow? Not that God made it narrow to exclude. It is narrow because it is exclusive in its requirements.

Matthew 7:21 — 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father.'

Matthew 7:24-27 — The wise man builds on the rock — hearing and doing Jesus' words. The foolish man builds on sand — hearing and not doing.

The gate is narrow because it is Jesus Himself. John 10:9 — 'I am the door.' John 14:6 — 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

It is narrow because you cannot bring your baggage through it. You cannot bring self-righteousness, your own garment (Matthew 22), your refusal to forgive, your love of sin. You must come through Christ alone, stripped, trusting Him.

That is hard — thlibo — compressed, afflicted. The way is hard because it requires repentance, faith, surrender. But hard does not mean impossible. Hard means costly.

II. WIDE IS THE GOODNESS THAT INVITES ALL TO ENTER IT

Here is your big idea, church: Narrow is the way, but wide is the goodness that invites all to enter it.

Psalms 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.' If He is good to all, His goodness invites all to the narrow gate.

Luke 13:24 — 'Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.' Why will they not be able? Verses 25-27 — because they come late, saying 'Lord, open to us,' but He says 'I do not know where you come from.' They ate and drank in His presence, heard Him teach in their streets, but never entered.

They seek without striving. They want heaven without the gate. They want the feast without the garment.

But read Luke 13:29 — the verse that explodes the narrowness: 'And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.'

From east and west! From north and south! That is wide! The invitation is from all compass points. The goodness is wide — as wide as the world.

The narrow gate is not narrow because God limited the invitation. It is narrow because there is only one way through — Christ — but that way is open to people from east and west, north and south.

Matthew 7:13 says many enter the wide gate. Matthew 7:14 says few find the narrow gate. Why few? Not because few are invited, but because few want to leave the broad way. The broad way is easy — no repentance, no surrender, do what you want. The narrow way requires you to enter by Christ.

But the command 'Enter' is to all. The goodness is wide.

III. THE ORCHARD GATE — Narrow Opening, Wide Orchard

In my figurative orchard, I have a fence around the whole place to keep deer out. The fence is wide — it goes around acres. But there is one gate — a narrow gate between two posts, just wide enough for a wheelbarrow.

Why is the gate narrow? Not to keep my grandchildren out. To keep deer out, and to keep my grandchildren in one way — through me. I stand at that gate. I say, 'Come in this way.'

The gate is narrow, but my goodness is wide — I invite all the lane to come through that gate to the feast.

If someone says, 'Your gate is narrow, you must not love many,' I say, 'No, my gate is narrow because I have only one entrance that protects the orchard, but my invitation is wide — come from east and west, north and south, come through the gate.'

That is Matthew 7:13-14 and Luke 13:29 together.

Narrow is the way — Jesus Christ alone — but wide is the goodness that invites all to enter it.

CONCLUSION — Enter

Jesus ends not with a doctrine of exclusion, but with a command of inclusion: 'Enter by the narrow gate.'

He does not say, 'Only a few are appointed to find it.' He says, 'Enter.'

And Luke 13:29 says people will come from east and west — Gentiles like us — and recline at table.

Impartial Grace: The gate is narrow — Christ alone. The goodness is wide — good to all, mercy over all He has made, inviting all to enter.

Grace for all. Hope for every soul. Because the narrow gate is open to all from east and west, north and south.

Let's pray.

For Ruminating This Week:

1. Read Matthew 7:13-27 and Luke 13:24-29 together. What makes the gate narrow? Who is invited from where in Luke 13:29?
2. Read John 10:9 and John 14:6. How is Jesus the narrow gate?
3. Under Psalm 145:9, how is 'good to all' compatible with 'narrow is the gate'?

SERMON 10 — DEPART FROM ME

Matthew 25:41,46

Text: Matthew 25:31-46, 2 Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 33:11, Psalm 145:9



Big Idea: The fire was prepared for the devil, not for you — God takes no pleasure in departure. Close the series at the table, not the gavel.

INTRODUCTION — The Hardest Words Jesus Ever Spoke

Read Matthew 25:41 — 'Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

And Matthew 25:46 — 'And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

This is the end of the series Impartial Grace, and we must end where Jesus ends His teaching on judgment — with the hardest words.

Many use this verse to say: See, God prepared hell for people. He made some for heaven, some for hell. He takes pleasure in sending people away.

But listen to the text itself: The fire was prepared for the devil and his angels — not for you.

That one phrase changes everything.

I. THE FIRE WAS PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL, NOT FOR YOU — Matthew 25:41

Matthew 25:41 — 'into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Greek: to pur to aionion to hetoimasmenon to diabolō kai tois angelois autou — the eternal fire having been prepared for the devil and his angels.

Jesus does NOT say 'prepared for you.' He says 'prepared for the devil.'

Revelation 20:10 — devil thrown into lake of fire. This fire has an original tenant. It was made for the rebellious angelic host who chose enmity against God.

But Matthew 25:31-46 shows people going there. How? By aligning themselves with the devil's works — not feeding the hungry, not clothing the naked, not visiting the prisoner — refusing the King's family.

They go not because God prepared it for them, but because they insist on following the one for whom it was prepared.

In my figurative orchard, I have a burn pile for thorns and blighted branches. I prepare that fire for the thorns, not for my grandchildren. But if my grandchild insists on holding onto blighted branches and says 'I will stay with these thorns,' they go where the thorns go — not because I prepared it for them, but because they refused to let go.

The fire was prepared for the devil, not for you.

II. GOD TAKES NO PLEASURE IN DEPARTURE — Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9

Ezekiel 33:11 — 'As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?'

This is God speaking. Does He take pleasure in departure? No. He says, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.'

2 Peter 3:9 — 'The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.'

Put those together with Matthew 25:41: God prepares fire for devil, not for you. He has no pleasure in death of wicked. He is patient, not wishing that any should perish.

How can anyone say God delights to send people away? He says the opposite.

Put it under Psalm 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.' If His mercy is over all He has made, then even when He says 'Depart from me,' it is with grief, not glee. With a broken heart, not a gavel's joy.

Matthew 23:37 — Jesus weeps over Jerusalem: 'How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!'

He was willing. They were not willing. That is why departure happens.

III. CLOSE AT THE TABLE, NOT THE GAVEL — Matthew 25:34

Now hear how this sermon series must close. We have spent ten sermons under Psalm 145:9 — The LORD is good to all.

We close not at the gavel of Matthew 25:41, but at the table of Matthew 25:34.

Matthew 25:34 — 'Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

Did you hear that? Fire prepared for devil. Kingdom prepared for you.

Two preparations:

Fire — prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41) — you were never meant to go there.

Kingdom — prepared for you from the foundation of the world (25:34) — you were meant to be at the table.

Which does God want for you? The table, not the gavel.

Ephesians 1:4 — chosen in Him before foundation of world to be holy and blameless. 1

Peter 1:20 — Christ foreknown before foundation, revealed for you.

God prepared a kingdom for you before He prepared a fire for the devil. His first thought for you is table, not fire.

Matthew 25:31-46 is about sheep and goats. Sheep inherit kingdom prepared for them. Goats depart into fire prepared for devil. The difference? Sheep fed, clothed, visited — they lived the King's heart. Goats did not. But even then, God takes no pleasure in their departure.

CONCLUSION — Impartial Grace, From First to Last

Let me close Impartial Grace where I close every sermon: At the table, not the gavel.

At the end of the day, I have a table. I invite as many as I find — bad and good — Matthew 22. I have a narrow gate but wide goodness — Matthew 7. I have two chairs looking out on the orchard — positioned to hear — Acts 13. I have white garments at the fence — garment is Christ — Matthew 22. I water the tender trees tonight, whole orchard in morning — specific prayer, expansive atonement — John 17. I pour rain on just and unjust — Matthew 5. My rain is impartial — Psalm 145:9 — good to all, mercy over all He has made.

And now, last sermon: Fire prepared for devil, not for you. Kingdom prepared for you from foundation of world.

If you hear 'Depart from me' one day, it will not be because God lacked goodness. It will be because you thrust aside goodness — Acts 13:46 — you judged yourself unworthy, you refused the garment, you would not enter the narrow gate, you would not come to the table.

But today, hear 'Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.'

Grace for all. Hope for every soul. Because the LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made — and His table was prepared for you before His fire was prepared for the devil.

Let's pray. And let's come to the table.

For Ruminating This Week — And For The Series:

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46 slowly. What was prepared for whom? Fire prepared for whom? Kingdom prepared for whom and when?
2. Read Ezekiel 33:11 and 2 Peter 3:9. Does God take pleasure in departure?
3. Read Psalm 145:9 as the banner over all ten sermons. How does 'good to all' and 'mercy over all He has made' fit with 'Depart from me' and 'Come, inherit'?

CONCLUDING CHAPTER — AT THE TABLE, NOT THE GAVEL

Impartial Grace — The Orchard Vision

Text: Psalm 145:9, Matthew 25:34



The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made. Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.

INTRODUCTION — Ten Sermons Under One Verse

We began with a single verse: Psalm 145:9 — 'The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.'

Ten sermons later, we have walked through the hardest texts in the Bible — the texts that are often used to say God is not good to all.

We did not avoid them. We opened them. And under that one verse, they began to sing the same song.

This concluding chapter is not a new sermon. It is the orchard seen from the hill — all ten trees in one view.

I. THE ORCHARD IN TEN TREES

Let me take you through the orchard one last time, tree by tree:

Tree 1 — Rain on Just and Unjust — Matthew 5:45. He makes His sun rise on evil and good, sends rain on just and unjust. Impartial provision proves impartial heart.

Tree 2 — The Wicked That He Hates — Psalm 11:5? No. He hates the wicked? Look at Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9. He has no pleasure in death of wicked. He hates sin, loves sinner enough to send rain.

Tree 3 — Esau I Hated — Malachi 1:2-3, Romans 9:13. Not eternal hatred of a baby before birth, but historical, covenantal choice of nations — Jacob over Esau for lineage of Messiah. And even Esau got rain, got land, got blessing — Genesis 33, Deuteronomy 2:5.

Tree 4 — Vessels of Wrath — Romans 9:22-23. Not vessels made for wrath from factory, but vessels who by longsuffering endured became fitted for wrath by their own thrusting aside — Acts 13:46.

Tree 5 — Hardening — Exodus 9:12, Romans 9:18. God hardened Pharaoh after Pharaoh hardened himself — five times Pharaoh hardened, then God gave him over. Hardening is judicial, not causative.

Tree 6 — I Pray Not for the World — John 17:9. That night He prayed for apostles specifically — three hours later He died for the world expansively — 1 Timothy 2:6 ransom for all. Intercession specific, atonement expansive. And who was missing in Upper Room? Judas — John 13:30 — it was night. Then Luke 23:34 — Father forgive them — even Judases.

Tree 7 — Appointed to Eternal Life — Acts 13:48. Tetagmenoi — middle voice — they aligned themselves, positioned themselves to hear. Begged in 13:42, gathered whole city in 13:44, rejoiced and glorified word in 13:48. Appointed because they aligned, not pre-programmed.

Tree 8 — Many Called, Few Chosen — Matthew 22:14. Call is wide — as many as you find, bad and good — garment is Christ — free but must be put on. No one turned away for lack of invitation, only for refusal of garment. Matthew 28:19 — all nations.

Tree 9 — The Narrow Gate — Matthew 7:13-14. Narrow is the way — Christ alone — but wide is the goodness that invites all to enter it. Command is 'Enter' — to all. East and west, north and south — Luke 13:29 — come to table.

Tree 10 — Depart From Me — Matthew 25:41,46. Fire prepared for devil and his angels, not for you. Kingdom prepared for you from foundation of world — 25:34. God takes no pleasure in departure — Ezekiel 33:11. Close at table, not gavel.

Ten trees. One orchard. One verse over them all: The LORD is good to all.

II. WHY THIS MATTERS — The Orchard Owner's Heart

Some say, 'What difference does it make? Preach the gospel either way.'

It makes all the difference to the child on the fence asking, 'Did God make me unable to believe? Did He prepare fire for me?'

Impartial Grace answers: No. Fire was prepared for devil, not for you. Kingdom was prepared for you from foundation. Rain falls on you because He is good to all. Sun rises on you because His mercy is over all He has made.

If you thrust it aside — Acts 13:46 — you judge yourself unworthy. But if you align, beg, gather, rejoice, glorify, put on Christ, enter narrow gate — you will inherit kingdom prepared for you.

This is not universalism — many do refuse garment, many do depart. But it is impartial grace — no one refuses because they were never invited, never provided garment, never given rain.

This matters for evangelism. How can we say 'God loves you' to all if He does not? How can we say 'Christ died for you' to all if He did not? Psalm 145:9 lets us say it with integrity: 'The LORD is good to all.' 1 Timothy 2:6 lets us say it with blood: 'Ransom for all.'

This matters for worship. We do not worship a God who made most people to burn and calls it glory. We worship a God who says, 'I have no pleasure in death of wicked, turn back, turn back, why will you die?' — Ezekiel 33:11 — and who opens narrow gate to east and west.

III. THE TABLE, NOT THE GAVEL — How We Close Every Sermon

I have closed every sermon in this series at the table, not the gavel.

Because that is how Jesus closes Matthew 25. Yes, 25:41 — Depart into fire prepared for devil. But 25:34 — Come, inherit kingdom prepared for you from foundation.

Which was prepared first? Kingdom. For whom? For you.

In my literal orchard, I want you to see final painting — bald-headed owner, normal size, not giant, arms open at long table, white garments on fence line — garment is Christ — stone arch gate wide open — narrow gate but wide goodness — thorn burn piles distant on hill — small, far, prepared for thorns, not for children — men, women, children coming from east and west.

That is Impartial Grace.

The table is set. The garments are hung. The gate is open. The rain has fallen on just and unjust. The sun has risen on evil and good. The invitation says 'as many as you find.'

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

CONCLUSION — Psalm 145:9 Over the Gate

If you nail one verse over your orchard gate, nail this:

Psalm 145:9 — The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.

Not good to some. Good to all.

Not mercy over some He made. Mercy over all He has made.

Grace for all. Hope for every soul.

At the table, not the gavel.

Come, inherit.

For Ruminating — The Whole Series:

1. Read Psalm 145:9 every day for ten days, and under it read one of the ten hard texts. How does 'good to all' and 'mercy over all' re-read that text?
2. Which of the ten trees was hardest for you? Which set you free?
3. Who in your lane needs to hear 'fire prepared for devil, not for you — kingdom prepared for you'? Invite them to table.

APPENDIX — Key WEB Verses Used Throughout Impartial Grace

Psalms 145:9: Yahweh is good to all. His tender mercies are over all his works. (Psalms 145:9 WEB)

John 17:9: I pray for them. I don't pray for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. (John 17:9 WEB)

John 17:6: I revealed your name to the people whom you have given me out of the world. They were yours, and you have given them to me. They have kept your word. (John 17:6 WEB)

John 17:11: I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are. (John 17:11 WEB)

John 17:12: While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name. Those whom you have given me I have kept. None of them is lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12 WEB)

John 17:15: I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. (John 17:15 WEB)

John 17:17: Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. (John 17:17 WEB)

John 17:20-21: Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. (John 17:20-21 WEB)

John 17:23: I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me. (John 17:23 WEB)

John 13:30: Therefore having received that morsel, he went out immediately. It was night. (John 13:30 WEB)

Luke 23:34: Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34 WEB)

1 Timothy 2:1-6: I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and givings of thanks be made for all men: for kings and all who are in high places, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6 WEB)

Hebrews 7:25: Therefore he is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, seeing that he lives forever to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25 WEB)

Romans 8:32: He who didn't spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32 WEB)

Matthew 25:34: Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;' (Matthew 25:34 WEB)

Matthew 25:41: Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels;' (Matthew 25:41 WEB)

Ezekiel 33:11: Tell them, 'As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, house of Israel?' (Ezekiel 33:11 WEB)

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but he is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 WEB)

Yahweh is good to all. His tender mercies are over all his works. (Psalm 145:9 WEB)

I pray for them. I don't pray for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. (John 17:9 WEB)

I revealed your name to the people whom you have given me out of the world. They were yours, and you have given them to me. They have kept your word. (John 17:6 WEB)

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name. Those whom you have given me I have kept. None of them is lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12 WEB)

I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are. (John 17:11 WEB)

I pray not that you would take them from the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. (John 17:15 WEB)

Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. (John 17:17 WEB)

Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me. (John 17:20-21 WEB)

I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me. (John 17:23 WEB)

Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.' (Luke 23:34 WEB)

Therefore having received that morsel, he went out immediately. It was night. (John 13:30 WEB)

I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and givings of thanks be made for all men: for kings and all who are in high places, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6 WEB)

Therefore he is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, seeing that he lives forever to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25 WEB)

He who didn't spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how would he not also with him freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32 WEB)