

WHO IS GOD CALLING NOW?

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WHAT IS A CALLING?

The word for calling comes from the same word as invited. In old English – bidden – invited.

In simple terms **a calling is an invitation.**

What is the invitation for? The parable in Matthew 22 says it is an invitation to a wedding feast:

Matthew 22:2 - “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son...”

Specifically it is the wedding feast of the Lamb:

Revelation 19:9 – “Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are **called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!**'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

The invitation to a marriage is an invitation to be adopted into God's own family!

ARE MANY BEING INVITED?

The scripture is very clear on this point:

Matthew 22:14 – “For **many** are called, but few chosen.”

Matthew 20:16 – “For **many** are called, but few chosen.”

God is not inviting only a few people he is calling MANY.

The harvest is enormous:

Luke 10:2 – “Then He said to them, '**The harvest truly is great**, but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.'”

The parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13) supports this fundamental truth with the seed (the invitation) being broadcast all over the place.

Many are called, but clearly only a *few* will be chosen.

WHAT IS IT TO BE CHOSEN?

The parable of the wedding feast makes it clear what it is to be chosen:

Matthew 22:12-14 – “So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here **without a wedding garment?**' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are invited, but few are chosen.'”

In other words you cannot just “*come as you are*”. You must change and be presented with the right garments. These “garments” are clearly described elsewhere as not just accepting Jesus Christ without action – but ***changing*** our hearts and the way we live our lives.

Ephesians 4:21-24 – “If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you **put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you **put on the new man** which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”

So, not only do we have to accept the invitation, to be chosen we also have to change the way we live our lives.

Another word used for the chosen is “the elect” and the process is “election”. As in:

2 Peter 1:10 - “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your **calling** and **election** sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall.

Those who make the choice to respond to the calling at this time are also called the *firstfruits*.

HOW MANY WISE CALLED?

Some say that not many wise are called – showing that the calling is selective. But the Bible does not say that. Note the following verse which is misleading in the KJV:

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 – “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.*”

The words “are called” are in italics and **were added by translators**. They are not in the original Greek. The verse is better rendered in the way the NIV expresses it:

“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”

I think it is obvious that most of the noble, mighty and wealthy would be unlikely to respond because of their general reliance on their own substance. As the parable of the sower says “...deceitfulness of riches”.

NO MAN CAN COME TO ME UNLESS THE FATHER DRAWS HIM

The following verses have been presented as proof that God is not inviting many today:

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."

John 6:65 – “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

However, we have to be careful not to read into these verses what it does not say. There is no mention of calling or invitation in these verses. These verses simply do not say that God is not inviting many today or that he is going to be restrictive in who is invites. It is also dangerous to build a contrary doctrine on a small number of verses.

If we look at this whole section of scripture we can see that this dialogue and response of Jesus was given *not* in reply to someone asking about whether only a few would be invited. It was on a totally different subject.

This whole section was made in comment to the murmuring doubt of the Jews that Jesus was from heaven. Jesus was clearly stating that the Father had sent him and that he **was empowered by the Father to call people to him**. He was stating that He was not doing this without authority.

What we have to ask is – Who is the Father drawing? As we have seen, the Father will draw anyone who responds to the invitation!

Earlier, Jesus had said that the Father is **seeking** people to worship him:

John 4:23 - "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

Obviously Jesus would not say that the Father is seeking people to be believers on one hand but not inviting everyone on the other.

Putting the "no man can come to me except the Father draws him" in context, it simply means that God is **not going to work with anyone who does not show a believing and repentant attitude.** (Jesus knew that many of these people would simply not believe.) But God will certainly draw anyone to Him who shows faith and changes their lives – something that the bulk of the Pharisees in their hard-heartedness never did.

He certainly was not making the calling restrictive because he clearly said in the *same section*:

John 6:40 - "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that **everyone** who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:51 - "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If **anyone** eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

Anyone and *everyone* can eat of it if they desire – its their choice to accept the invitation!

To make the words "drawing" somehow synonymous to "inviting" is not scriptural. The Father's drawing takes place *after* someone accepts the open invitation.

WHAT IS THE INVITATION OFFERED TO?

This is a big subject and is actually the whole plan of God starting back in the time of Abraham. In a section of scripture from Matthew 21:23 to Matthew 22:15, Jesus uses some parables to explain the entire plan.

These parables explain that the invitation was originally to the nation of Israel but they rejected it. God wanted them to be a special people – but they rejected God's law, they killed the prophets and finally the Son himself.

When they as a nation rejected the invitation to the wedding, the invitation was offered to the Gentiles:

Matthew 21:35-41 "And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and

killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers? They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and **lease his vineyard to other vinedressers** who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.'

Matthew 21:42-45 – “Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'? **Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.** And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.”

Matthew 22:8-10 - "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but **those who were invited were not worthy.** Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

Clearly:

Romans 9:30-32 – “What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. **For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.**”

Romans 11:11 – “I say then, have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has **come to the Gentiles.**”

Gentiles are **all those who are not Israelites**. So the invitation which originally was only to Israel, is now **to the whole world**.

This is in part what was prophesied to Abraham thousands of years ago – that **all nations** would be blessed through him:

Galatians 3:8 – “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you **all the nations** shall be blessed.'

IS THE INVITATION SELECTIVE?

All are invited – both good and bad:

Matthew 22:9-10 - 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together **all whom they found, both bad and good.** And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

The invitation is therefore **not selective** – but open to all who hear.

HOW MANY RESPOND?

Matthew 7:13-14 - "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. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and **there are few who find it.** (Lamsa: "**and few are those who are found on it.**")

WHY DON'T MANY RESPOND?

The parable of the sower and the seed explains why people don't respond.

Matthew 13:19-23 - "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then **the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.** This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet **he has no root in himself**, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the **cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word**, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

We are given a number of reasons in this parable why people don't respond:

- Satan – who works at deceiving the whole world
- Persecution and tribulation – too hard for many
- Cares of the world – wrapped up in the world
- Deceitfulness of riches – thinking they don't need God
- A person not allowing the roots of the calling to grow – laziness, lack of interest, no teacher, hard-heartedness etc.

We must logically assume that if many are being called, that **many must be open to understanding His truth.**

There is nothing in any of the parables that implies there is another group of people who are not allowed to be called at this time.

As a nation, Israel rejected the invitation, but *individual* Jews and Israelites **did** respond in the New Testament – showing that even Israelites are still welcome to take up the calling personally.

WHO IS REPENTANCE NOW GRANTED TO?

We must be able to assume that if God is requiring a group of people to repent – that those same group of people must be capable of understanding the errors of their ways and seeing the truth and repenting.

Asking someone to repent on one hand and then denying them understanding would be a double bind.

We have to assume that all those who hear the call and are asked to repent are also being invited.

Who is God therefore requiring to repent today?

Acts 17:30 - "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but **now commands all men everywhere** to repent."

Titus 2:11 – "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to **all men.**"

Mark 6:12 – "So they went out and preached **that people should repent.**"

Luke 24:47 - "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to **all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem."

Acts 11:18 - "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also **granted to the Gentiles** repentance to life.'"

Acts 20:21 - "testifying to **Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

Acts 26:20 - "but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout **all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent**, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."

Mark 16:15-16 – "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to **every creature**. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but **he who does not believe will be condemned.**"

Is it logical to say on one hand that repentance is required by all – and then say that God has blinded most people and they couldn't understand the gospel even if they wanted to? God is not unjust.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLINDED?

The Bible talks about people being blinded.

2 Corinthians 4:4 - "...whose minds the god of this age has **blinded**, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."

In this instance we read that the god of this age (Satan) has blinded people. Blinding, in simple terms, means being deceived in some way and to not see the truth.

Because Satan has blinded people does that mean that they are incapable of responding to the truth? Does it also mean that people are blinded against their own desires?

No! Being blinded does not in any way imply that the person's individual freedom has been taken away. It simply says that the person has allowed themselves to be deceived in a similar way to someone who is caught up in a cult.

Look how pervasive Satan's influence is:

1 John 5:19 - We know that we are of God, and **the whole world** lies under the sway of the wicked one.

Satan's influence is so great that he "deceives the whole world."

Revelation 12:9 - "...that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who **deceives the whole world.**"

The whole world mostly lies "blinded" under the sway of Satan.

But any of these people who have been blinded by Satan are capable of breaking out of the trap by sincerely turning to God.

No one can be deceived (blinded) against his will! **But we can allow ourselves as individuals and as a nation to drop into such a state of slumber and stupor that we end up being, in reality, blind.**

Remember that **we were also once blind** as well so it is not impossible for someone who is blinded to have their eyes opened. Notice:

Titus 3:3 – "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, **deceived**, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another."

Ephesians 2:2 – "...in which **you once walked** according to the course of this world, **according to the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience..."

The role of a Christian is to help break through the blindness upon people by teaching and spreading the Gospel.

DOES GOD ALSO BLIND?

God *does* allow people to be deceived and blinded for his purposes.

A good example of how God specifically set out to deceive someone is the example of Ahab. God wanted Ahab to go up to battle and lose his life so that his prophecy against him of a bloody death could be fulfilled.

1 Kings 22:20-23 - "And the Lord said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. "Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' "The Lord said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, '**I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.**' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' "Therefore look! **The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours**, and the Lord has declared disaster against you."

God knew that this evil king Ahab *so hated* God's prophet Micaiah that even when he heard stated out loud that the whole thing was a deception from God - he would still go up to

battle on the lying advice of his false prophets. God could predict in advance how evil Ahab would react because **he knew Ahab's heart**. God did *not* have to do something in Ahab's mind to blind him – he simply presented something through his false prophets that he knew Ahab would fall for.

There is nothing to imply either in God's nature nor in the way he operates that he has some other way of blinding people against their will. To do so would remove their power of free choice – something which we have no evidence at all that God does.

The way God dealt with Pharaoh is a clear example of how God works with someone for his purpose. God used the knowledge of Pharaoh's character and hardened his heart so that his purpose could be fulfilled.

If you go through the story of the Exodus, you will see that in some cases it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart and in other places it says that Pharaoh himself hardened it. Eg:

Exodus 8:32 – “But **Pharaoh hardened** his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go.”

Exodus 9:12 – “But the **Lord hardened** the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them...”

There is no contradiction here. God merely worked things knowing that Pharaoh would react in a predictable way. In the very beginning, in burning bush, God said that he knew Pharaoh wouldn't let them go easily.

Exodus 3:19-20 - "But **I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go**, no, not even by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.”

How did he know this? Because God had raised up Pharaoh for this very purpose. In other words he ensured that the man's personality and training he received from his youth made him into the **proud** ruler he was. An absolute god-ruler like Pharaoh was not going to let his wealth of workers go easily – even under enormous pressure.

Note what was common knowledge:

1 Samuel 6:6 - "Why then do you harden your hearts **as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?** When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?"

God did not take away Pharaoh's freedom of choice – He simply played on Pharaoh's basic stubborn and proud nature. Pharaoh was responsible for his own actions.

In the same way it is easily possible for people today to harden the hearts of their sons and daughters by the training of their youth. For example, in certain cultures and countries in Europe and the Middle East, people learn to hate others of another race from a very young age. These people have been “blinded” and have had their hearts hardened by their parents and environment. Such hardening of the heart certainly becomes an enormous stumbling block to a person seeing the truth – but it is not a removal of their free agency.

With persistent and honest persuasion it is possible for them to understand where they have been deceived.

We are told not to harden our hearts (because it is our choice):

Hebrews 3:15 - "...while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion.'"

God is certainly not going to stop a sincere person from understanding the truth. He cannot do this because he made each of us as a **free moral agent**.

Another similar example of how God works with the unrighteous is in Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 – "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.** And **for this reason God will send them strong delusion**, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

These verses clearly show that these people could have received the truth and be saved but *chose* not to. Because they accepted unrighteousness, God let them be deluded (blinded).

We should realise that being deceived, having our hearts hardened, and our minds blinded by Satan is a very real possibility if we deny God's obvious being and neglect our great calling.

WAS ISRAEL BLINDED?

The Bible tells us that Israel was blinded. But we must go back a long way to understand how and why this came about.

The book of Deuteronomy summarises what God was offering Israel. He laid out all the blessings that he was prepared to offer them and warned them what would happen if they didn't listen to him. He then gave them the freedom of choice:

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 - "See, I have set before you today **life and good, death and evil**, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. 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."

God always gives the choice – he does not force someone to choose life and he certainly does not block or blind someone from choosing life.

However Israel did not choose life and rejected him totally. As a result of their rejection, then God rejected Israel (for now) and they became blind:

Jeremiah 5:21 – “Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not”

Note carefully how this blinding took place:

Zechariah 7:11-13 - "But **they refused to heed**, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, **they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear** the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the Lord of hosts.

It was the people who hardened their hearts and blinded themselves to the truth. **They wanted nothing to do with God and his wrath came down on them.**

This hardness of heart of Israel was the thing that brought the greatest grief to God. From the start he yearned for them to have the right heart.

It got to the point that God knew that they would not listen. Look at what God said to Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 3:7-11 - "But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for **all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted**. Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house. Moreover He said to me: 'Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse.'"

And to Isaiah:

Isaiah 6:8-10 – “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me. And He said, 'Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.'"

It had reached a point where God **knew they would not respond**. Isaiah was told to **MOCK** them saying “keep on hearing, but don't understand, keep on seeing, but don't perceive”. Ezekiel's message to them was rejected as God expected and they hardened their heart even further. The people were left in their blind state.

And it appeared that they even liked hearing falsehoods and being blind to the truth:

Jeremiah 5:30-31 - "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: **The prophets prophesy falsely**, and the priests rule by their own power; **and My people love to have it so**. But what will you do in the end?"

In the same way that Israel became blind, God deals with those who deny his clear revelation and rejects the law he puts in their hearts:

Romans 1:20-22 – "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and **their foolish hearts were darkened**. Professing to be wise, they **became fools**."

Blinding is always a result of mans own choices – not the choice of God. In the Bible, blinding from God only occurred when the people were sinning and rejecting him. Those that turned back to him were always welcome.

Very importantly, even blind Israel was always welcome to come back to God and be healed:

Isaiah 1:18-19 - "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land...'"

COULD GOD HAVE REMOVED ISRAEL'S BLINDNESS?

Yes! And he did so many times! The entire book of Judges is the story of God punishing Israel to wake them up to their sins.

Over and over Israel lost sight of God (became blind and foolish in their behaviour) and then suffered the consequences. God shook them up many times, forgave them and then sent someone to save them and give them another chance. Many, many times he intervened for them – continuing throughout the period of the Kings.

Finally, as we have read in the prophets (Ezekiel, Isaiah etc) he **left them in their stupor** and foolishness and sent them into captivity. It got to the point where God did not want them to respond because he said he would not hear them anyway:

Jeremiah 11:14 - "So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will **not hear them** in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble."

To some people, it seemed that God cast his people away.

But there **was a great purpose** to his choice at that time in what he did:

Paul explains this purpose in a section he wrote to the Gentiles in Rome:

Romans 11:1-2 - "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew."

The bulk of Israel never got what it could have had because **they blinded themselves in sin and unbelief**:

Romans 11:7–10 – “What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.' And David says: 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.'”

Here is the real reason God left them in their blind state:

Romans 11:11-12 - “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But **through their fall**, to provoke them to jealousy, **salvation has come to the Gentiles**. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!”

He uses the analogy of an olive tree with the Gentiles being grafted in:

Romans 11:19-20 - “You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well said. **Because of unbelief** they were broken off, and you stand by faith.”

Here he explains this mystery clearly:

Romans 11:25–26 – “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that ***blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in***. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;”

Remember the Gentiles are non-Israelites – so salvation has now come to the **whole world**.

Jesus also specifically “unblinded” Paul by striking him down and speaking to him. He did this so that Paul could be used for this great work.

So there was great purpose in God leaving Israel blinded – because it opened the way for the gospel to be preached to the **whole world** and **many** people to be offered the calling. This is the opposite of saying that only a few are being called today.

ARE NEW TESTAMENT JEWS BLINDED?

Israel was still blinded in Jesus day because God's plan was for the gospel to go out to the Gentiles. Notice that the same **hard-heartedness** of Israel of old prevailed among the majority:

John 12:37-41 – “But *although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him*, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 'He has blinded their eyes and

hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.”

To show that the blinding was not out of their own control, we can see that some believed – but wouldn't admit it:

John 12:42 – “Nevertheless **even among the rulers many believed** in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”

Jesus was so exasperated at one stage that He said that if the miracles that were done to them were done in the gentile nations – they would have believed! “Woe to you” he said!

Again, there was no blindness that (if they softened their hearts) they could not have sorted out.

Note carefully the way that Jesus chided His disciples when they also were hard hearted and didn't believe at times. Jesus used the same quote from Isaiah and **reproached them** for having eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear. Again, it was their choice:

Mark 8:17-18 – “But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, 'Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? 'Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand...”

Paul had the same problem with the Jews:

Acts 28:24-28 - “And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, "saying, 'Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes **they have closed**, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

Note again that it was themselves who blocked their minds and Paul was not impressed!

WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES

At one stage the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables. He said (again quoting the same scripture from Isaiah):

Matthew 13:9-17 - "He who has ears to hear, let him hear! And the disciples came and said to Him, '**Why do You speak to them in parables?**' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to

them it has not been given... Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

“And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. **Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.** But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

We must remember that this prophecy in Isaiah was about the same **Israel** - who did not want to be healed by God and who closed their eyes and ears against him. This is exactly what they did to Jesus as well. As we saw in John “...*although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him*”. In the same way he did mighty miracles and yet a lot of them followed him just to get a meal (John 6:26)! **Truly a hard-hearted people.**

Because of this, Jesus deliberately spoke to the Israelites in parables so that they would not understand. Even the apostles (who were not hard-hearted) did not understand sometimes. Jesus did this to ensure that his Father's purpose would be done – both in ensuring that the gospel would go to the Gentiles and that his own death would take place as prophesied.

These words of Jesus have often been taken out of context to prove that not all people are being called now. But as we have seen, this prophecy was **only to hard-hearted Israel because of their own sins.**

IS THE REST OF THE WORLD BLINDED?

There is no talk at all of God blinding the Gentiles in the New Testament. However, the natural state of all mankind is not one of seeking God's way of life:

Romans 8:7 – “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

When we follow our natural nature we are automatically alienated from God and have our understanding darkened. Ignorance also plays a big part in someone's blindness. This is how the Gentiles lived:

Ephesians 4:17-19 – “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, **having their understanding darkened**, being alienated from the life of God, because of the **ignorance that is in them**, because of the **hardening of their heart**; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

Note again, that the blindness was caused by ignorance and hardening of heart. Israel could not claim ignorance as an excuse – but the Gentiles could.

But even in this state, there is nothing to stop someone from responding to the truth. Note what God said to Paul:

Acts 26:15-18 - "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, **to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Note that Paul was specifically given the responsibility to open the eyes of the Gentiles to the truth. God certainly did not want them blinded!

ARE THE BLIND ACCOUNTABLE?

Israel was certainly accountable for their blindness as we have already seen.

If God had blinded them, or Pharaoh, or anyone else against their will then they could justifiably claim that they had no choice in the matter. God certainly could not be overly angry with them. **But God gives them no such excuse.** He held them totally accountable and his anger was very great:

Jeremiah 36:7 - "It may be that they will present their supplication before the Lord, and everyone will turn from his evil way. **For great is the anger and the fury that the Lord has pronounced against this people.**"

We also see Jesus react the same way to the Pharisees, whom he clearly said were blind:

Matthew 15:12-14 - Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

Matthew 23:16 - "**Woe to you**, blind guides..."

Jesus did not cut the Pharisees any slack at all.

God's anger is against any people who suppress truth. In the end they become blinded:

Romans 1:18-19 - "For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, **who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them...so they are **without excuse**, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

The Bible makes it plain that the understanding of a lot of God's law (eg. murder, hatred, adultery, lying, stealing, sexual perversions etc) is inside of us all and there is **simply no excuse.**

Fortunately, repentance is open to **all**.

HOW DOES SOMEONE HAVE THEIR MIND OPEN?

We can see the example of how Paul worked with the Gentiles. Notice that his job was to open their eyes:

Acts 26:15-18 - "...the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, **to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

How did Paul do this?

Acts 17:2-4 - "Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for **three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures**, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ. **And some of them were persuaded**; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."

Paul followed his commission by spending hours and hours expounding the scriptures to these people. Some were persuaded and some were not. The same that occurred in the ministry of Jesus.

This is the basic way that anyone comes to the truth – by having the scriptures **expounded** to them from a teacher:

Romans 10:14-15 – "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?** And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'"

Ignorance, blindness, deception all can be addressed by teaching the truth. But in the end of the day, it is up to the person himself to respond and not be entrenched in hard-heartedness.

IS THERE ANYTHING STOPPING A REPENTANT PERSON COMING TO GOD?

The Bible is totally consistent throughout – that God will accept **anyone** who comes to Him in a repentant attitude. Even the vilest people in history (Ahab, Manasseh etc) got God's attention when they turned to Him. Why should it be different today? There is certainly nothing in the Bible to say otherwise.

Countless scriptures give **everyone** the opportunity to come to Christ:

Matthew 7:7-8 – "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **For everyone** who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matthew 11:28 - "Come to Me, **all** you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

One of the most powerful scriptures to this end is the very words of Jesus inviting anyone who thirsts:

John 7:37-38 - "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If **anyone** thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. '**He who believes in Me**, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Notice that any blinding is specifically removed when someone turns to the Lord:

2 Corinthians 3:12-16 – "Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech - unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But **their minds were blinded**. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. **Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.**"

The scriptures are consistent and many on this subject. God's calling has always been open to all who are not hard hearted and who are tremble at God's word:

Isaiah 66:2 – "For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the LORD. '**But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.**'"

WHAT ABOUT PREDESTINATION?

Are only certain people predestined to be called today? The following scriptures are sometimes used to support this viewpoint:

Romans 8:28-30 - "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. **Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called**; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Ephesians 1:4-11 - "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having **predestined us to adoption** as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

A study in predestination is a big subject of itself and not the purpose of this paper. However, the Bible is extremely clear on the subject that God himself can change his mind on a matter – the same as a man or woman can at any time in their life. The future has *not* been written in advance – except where God guides events to work out history for His purpose.

God also chooses certain specific people in advance for His purpose – eg. John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Josiah etc. But to extend this to say that God has selected *individually* all those who will respond to His calling in advance, **defies all the lessons of the Bible in the way God works**. It also means that God knows who will succeed and who will fail. This is not a true understanding.

What these verses about predestination are really saying is that **this whole plan of God has been laid out from the foundation of the world**. From the very beginning, God had planned to send his son down to this earth to die for all people (Genesis 3:15, Romans 16:25, Ephesians 3:11, Colossians 1:26, etc). From the foundation of the world, he also **planned to adopt sons into his family** – both from Israel and from the Gentiles. All this was known in advance and was foreknown and predestined. But it does not mean that God has selected the individuals involved. To do so goes contrary to giving all the free choice to choose whether they will respond or not – something the bible in no way supports.

As far as guaranteeing the outcome, predestination simply means “to be set on a specific destination”. It does not mean that the outcome is determined. From God's perspective, it is certainly guaranteed that he will never let us down, but we can't say that about ourselves.

One of the biggest arguments against any concept of God's calling being predetermined to a special select few, is the example of the **enormous effort** put out by the Apostle Paul as he endeavoured to persuade Jews and Gentiles to understand the truth. And not only Paul – *all* the disciples and people of God for centuries have put out **extraordinary efforts** to preach the gospel to people.

If God has predetermined who is going to be called today – why did someone like Paul unnecessarily risk life and limb and suffer? Paul describes the struggles he went to in preaching the gospel in 2 Corinthians 11. Beatings, perils, hunger, thirst, shipwrecks, weariness and toil – for years! If God had predetermined who would be called and who wouldn't – why go to this extreme? Time and time again, Paul spent hours with hard hearted people trying to persuade them in the truth. **Why would he do this if they couldn't hear anyway?**

Is it really logical to think that God has predestined those whom he will call and then rely on us to get in contact with them? What if we fail to make it to them in time and they don't hear the message?

No, God has *not* closed the door on who can be called. Nothing could be further from the truth.

WHAT ABOUT HIDDEN THINGS?

There is a difference between *something* that is hidden and *someone* being blinded for the purpose of salvation. God did not choose to reveal his whole plan of salvation in detail in one hit and has been successively revealing it through the generations. This has nothing to do with blinding due to sin.

Up to the time of Jesus, many things were hidden - especially the details in relation to the Messiah and salvation. Jesus had revealed many of these things to his disciples:

Luke 10:21–24 – “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.'”

During history a great many prophets asked about these things but were not told the answers.

1 Peter 1:10-11 – “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, **searched intently and with the greatest care**, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

Jesus had only told his disciples these things but after his death and resurrection it was open to all. Paul says that his job was to preach to the gentiles and to make **everyone** see and understand the mysteries of salvation which have been hidden for millennia:

Ephesians 3:8-10 – “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and **to make all/see** what is the fellowship of the mystery, which **from the beginning of the ages has been hidden** in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”

So clearly, there is knowledge and understanding which is withheld until the time is right for it to be revealed. For example, some knowledge of prophecy is reserved until the end time:

Daniel 12:9 – “And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”

The knowledge of the Messiah was **successively revealed** during Jesus life but was not fully understood until after his death. In some matters Jesus did not speak plainly even to the disciples until the right time:

John 16:25 - "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.”

This was all done for a purpose. One of which was to ensure that Jesus was not taken before his time.

So during Jesus' ministry a number of things were kept cryptic. But after his death and resurrection, they understood with the help of the Holy Spirit the mysteries of salvation.

Having something hidden has nothing to do with God's calling. Even today there are many hidden things that we will not understand until Christ's return.

WE HAVE TO GET RESULTS!

One negative result which has resulted in a limited view of God's calling is the idea that a witness and warning is somehow fulfilling the commission given to the church.

But we are clearly told that we **have to get results**:

Matthew 28:19-20 – “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptising them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them** to observe all things that I have commanded you.”

And isn't this the story of the New Testament? Apostles and others giving it their all to convert people to Christ?

Is our commission and is given to us collectively *and* personally.

In the end we will be judged, not by how much we just preach the Gospel, but by the *results* of the changed hearts of people turning to righteousness.

Daniel 12:2-3 – “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and **those who turn many to righteousness** like the stars forever and ever.”

CONCLUSION

The invitation that God is giving to mankind is a wonderful opportunity and available for **all who will soften their heart to respond**. Remember that God “**commands all men everywhere** to repent”!

If we have a wrong understanding that teaches that only certain people are being called, we can become self satisfied, slack and lazy in God's work. We can lose the passion. And make no mistake about it, the passion we feel inside must come not just from being filled with wonderful knowledge for ourselves – it must be a fire to do a work and make a difference!

If we have a wrong understanding that it is ok just to broadcast a message and send out a warning then we are really missing the main tenant of the scriptures. The scriptures *command* us to go beyond just preaching the gospel – we have to **make disciples of all nations**. If the results are not there from our preaching, then we need to work harder – not congratulate ourselves for simply sending out the message.

The role of a Christian is to help **break the blindness** upon people by teaching and spreading the Gospel. We are to convert them to God's way.

To do so requires serious **effort and persuasion** - especially to an increasingly hard-hearted world turned against God. But it can be done. If Paul could convince some of the hard-hearted Pharisees to turn to God, then anything is possible.

There is nothing magical about someone being blind. Blindness is a result of many factors including Satan's influence, ignorance, hard-heartedness, sin, deceit and being overtaken by the cares of the world.

As Christians we have to live as a light to the world and be willing to give an earnest answer when we are asked.

1 Peter 3:15 – “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

Lets pray for those opportunities to give that defence!