

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?



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In these next three lessons, we will be looking at the role that numbers play in the Bible. When you hear the phrase "numbers in the Bible" what comes to mind?... 7? 40? 12? - all of these are good examples of numbers in the Bible. Or did you think of the *book* of Numbers? It's funny to think that there is actually a book called "Numbers" in the Bible.

Nevertheless, numbers have an important function in what we see throughout the Bible. As we go through this particular lesson, we will see several places in the scriptures where numbers are used to help us understand by framing a situation or circumstance. Although viewing things from this perspective can seem harsh at times, it is a useful "tool" for relating the things in the Bible to our own lives. With that in mind, let's start in Psalm 90, beginning with verse 9.

COUNTING OUR DAYS

Psalm 90:9-1

⁹For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. ¹⁰The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. ¹¹Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. ¹²So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Verse 12 is really the verse that I want to focus in on here. But before we get to that, notice what is said leading up to this in verse 11. It says "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" - which nowadays we don't hear too much about God's wrath and anger; we always hear about God's goodness. But if we are going to tell the *whole* story, there is that aspect of God's wrath, which we also see alluded to in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11, where the apostle Paul says 'knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men'. So there *is* this aspect of God also, there is a harshness. We are so used to living in the grace and goodness of God, that sometimes we don't really take into account the fullness of *who* God is - and as it says here, His wrath and anger.

But as we get to verse 12, it says 'so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom'. And here we see the instruction given, to number our days. But what does that mean? It means to really calculate and try to understand how many days we truly have. It would be interesting if when we came into this world, on our birth certificates... they put your name, your parents' names and everything else - but could you imagine if on your birth certificate there was also a space for the number? And in there it was actually the number of days you are going to get in your life...

Just because we don't put that on the birth certificate doesn't mean that there *isn't* a set number of days that we're actually going to get. This verse is telling us that we should number our days; we should be mindful that we only have so many days. It is easy for us to number the days that are *behind* us - we can look back and that's how we keep track of our age. We say 'Okay I've lived this many days, I can number that'. But as far as knowing how many more days are ahead, we just don't know.

What we read here in Psalm 90 is truly sobering, because it brings awareness to our limitations and the finite nature of our existence here. We have only a **number** of days, and by being mindful of this we are more likely to spend those days wisely. Therefore, the best way to live is by seeking the Lord and doing His will. That's what we *should* be doing with our days.

FRAMING "BY THE NUMBERS"

We've all heard the saying "numbers don't lie", and when we approach the scriptures from that viewpoint, we receive the truth without any sugarcoating - it is very cut and dry. As we continue on in this lesson, pay close attention to the value of calculating the factors in a given scenario, to assess it properly. Also, notice how the numbers 'frame' the things we can learn from the Bible.

With this in mind, let's go to the book of Luke in chapter 14 and verse 27, where we will see Jesus teach by using an example that frames a situation 'by the numbers'.

Luke 14:27-31

²⁷ And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? ²⁹ Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, ³⁰ Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

So here we see Jesus teaching the importance of 'counting the cost' of being a disciple; to sit down ahead of time and assess the situation 'by the numbers'. By looking at things in this way, we put feelings aside and get to the raw truth of the matter.

Let's now go to Matthew chapter 26 to see an example that will direct us towards the main point of this lesson.

Matthew 26:20-22

²⁰ Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. ²¹ And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. ²² And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

Now the reason I'm bringing this out is because we see a scenario here with Jesus and His apostles - but we also see some numbers that help us to flesh out the situation. They are there in the room, Jesus and the twelve. Then Jesus says 'one of you is going to betray me'. So if we frame this by the numbers... if you were to just walk into that room and *randomly* pick one of the apostles, the odds are that you are *not* going to pick the one who will betray Jesus. There were eleven who didn't betray Him, and there is only one that did.

Setting the framework by the numbers, and not knowing anything about the apostles' personalities... if you were to just say 'I pick this one', the odds of you actually picking His betrayer are low. There are eleven who are loyal and there is one betrayer. So the odds are against it. Moving forward in this lesson, we will view the following scriptures from that perspective. **What are the odds?...**

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Let's stay here in Matthew and go to chapter 17 verse 27. This one is a little bit different, but we are going to use that same type of framework. And just to give some context, this is when Peter was asked whether or not Jesus would pay tribute (tax). Jesus giving His answer, says to Peter:

Matthew 17:27

²⁷ Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

So here we see Jesus telling His disciple, 'Go to the sea, cast in your hook. The first fish that comes out - open his mouth and there's going to be a coin in there'.

To that I would say... what are the odds? What are the odds of that actually happening? We really don't have the numbers here of how many fish were in that sea, but we can imagine what the actual odds are. The chance that the first fish you catch has a coin in its mouth to pay your taxes - is *extremely* unlikely.

Let's look at one more place in the book of Matthew in chapter 7, starting at verse 13:

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴ Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

In this scripture we don't see specific numbers, but we can understand the 'numbers' as groups. There is a group of 'many' and then there is a group that has 'a few'. So even though we don't know the exact numbers, we can still look at this and ask, 'well, what are the odds?' If we use this verse to understand what awaits us after our time on earth, it is summed up here as a ratio - 'By the numbers'. It is *more likely* that someone is going to be lost, than it is that someone is actually going to be saved. So, what are the odds?

If we think about it, when you frame things according to numbers - it doesn't matter persons, it doesn't matter personalities. That is just the situation that we are in. We are in a world where, **by the numbers** - the odds are that *any* person you happen to meet - according to the numbers, the odds are that they are not going to Heaven. And if the odds are that they are not going to Heaven, then that also means... the odds are that they are going to Hell. Unfortunately, that's just the bottom line.

That's numbers. That's the situation framed by the numbers. So, any person that you've ever met in this walk of life, any random person that you go up to on the street - if you look at the situation from the viewpoint of numbers, the odds are that they are not going to make it. A very sobering and hard pill to swallow.

An even harder pill is that... we've all been here however many years. We all know ourselves. How many mornings have you looked at yourself in the mirror? And when you look at yourself and realize that this is the framework that we're actually in here on earth - you can look at yourself and say 'the odds are, that the person I'm looking at in the mirror is not going to Heaven'. Those are the true odds of this situation we're in, regardless of who you are. **The odds are, the person in the mirror is not going to Heaven.** According to the numbers, according to the odds. This can all seem very dark, but the good news is that there is hope.

So the question then becomes: **How do we beat the odds?** The Bible teaches us that there is a way to beat the odds. There is only one way to beat those numbers. Even though it is more likely that a person is not going to make it, *there is a way to beat those odds.* And we'll go to John chapter 14 verse 6 to see what that one way is.

John 14:6

⁶Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

So if you want to know the way to beat the odds that are against us and find salvation, Jesus says "I am the way". **Jesus is the way we can beat those odds.**

Salvation is spoken of in many ways throughout the scripture, and we see Jesus Himself clearly speaking of this One Way of salvation in Mark chapter 16, starting in verse 15.

Mark 16:15-16

¹⁵And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

It doesn't get much simpler than that. If we look at this, Jesus gives two conditions. There are two things stated here: one is the condition for being saved, the other is the condition for being lost. When it comes to being saved, Jesus says 'He that believeth and is baptized **shall be saved**'. I am pretty sure that we can take Jesus at His Word. By believing and being baptized according to scripture, you will be saved. And then Jesus gives the condition for being lost - 'He that believeth **not shall be damned**'.

The sobering nature of viewing these things through the lens of numbers in this lesson reminds me of something that I once heard preached at a funeral. As the preacher was preaching, he said something that caught everyone's ear. But I think that it caught my ear a little bit differently. He began to talk about the Lamb's book of life and that when someone gets called by God to go Home - if they are known by God, they get called *by name*. He said, "if God knows you He calls you by name. It is not like in the 'world' when someone passes, the saying goes 'his number got called'. But when God knows you, you get called *by name*."

I thought to myself that this was a really good point, but that it goes both ways. Not only is it that when God knows *you*, He calls you by name - but also, when you know *Him*, you call *Him* by name. When you truly know God you don't call Him by a number, just like you wouldn't want Him to call you by a number. **You call Him by name.** And if we look at Acts chapter 4 verse 12, we see a little bit more about that name. Apostle Peter says in verse 12:

Acts 4:12

¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

There is only One Name, there is only One Way. There is only One Name given under Heaven whereby we must be saved, and that is by the name of Jesus Christ.

So, if we realize that the odds are stacked against every one of us making it to Heaven, it is wise to do what Jesus commanded for salvation in Mark 16:16. And as Peter also instructed in Acts 2:38, we must repent and be baptized **in the name of Jesus Christ** for the remission of our sins.

In closing, I hope we can all reflect on the importance of how we are spending our days. Are you seeking the Lord with all your heart? If you are one that has not placed your faith in Jesus by obeying the gospel and entering through that narrow gate, do it while there is time. Number your days. If you'd like to be added to the body of Christ or address any of your spiritual needs, contact us at www.hisway.life/contact or by [clicking here](#) and we will help you in any way possible.

Be blessed in Jesus' name.