

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-25-16 PM NOTES
"WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO NEVER HEAR OF JESUS?"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
7 in Series, "Answering 10 Questions Skeptics Ask"

People Group—The largest group through which the Gospel can flow without encountering barriers of understanding and acceptance.

People Groups in the World—11,498

People Groups with less than 2% Evangelical Christians (Unreached People Groups)—6,803

People Groups with less than 2% Evangelical Christians and unengaged by Christian mission efforts (Unengaged Unreached People Groups)—3,040

Unengaged Unreached People Groups with a population of more than 100,000—323 [International Mission Board Website]

I. The Answers We Must Reject

A. Universalism

John 3:18 (ESV) "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Revelation 21:8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

B. Inclusivism

John 1:12 "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

C. Hypothetical Foreknowledge

D. The Innocent Native View

John 3:18 (ESV) "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

II. The Justice of God

Acts 10:34-35 (ESV) "³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'"

Deuteronomy 32:3-4 "For I proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He."

Nehemiah 9:33 "However, You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly."

Isaiah 45:21b (NKJV) "...and there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior."

Acts 3:14 (NKJV) "But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you."

Romans 3:26 "for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

1 John 1:9 (ESV) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

III. The Mercy of God

Ephesians 2:4-5 "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)".

Romans 9:15 "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'"

IV. The Truth That Is Universal

A. The Inner Knowledge of God's Existence

Romans 1:19 "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."

B. The Observation of Creation

Romans 1:20 "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Psalms 19:1 "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

Romans 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Romans 1:21-23 "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

C. The Conscience That Is Universal

Romans 2:14-15 "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

Romans 2:1 "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."

Luke 12:47-48a "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few."

V. The Urgency of Our Mandate

Romans 10:14-15 "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'"

Mark 16:15 "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.'"

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Chapter 7: What Happens to Those Who Have Never Heard of Jesus?

What Happens to Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel

Series: Answering 10 Questions Skeptics Ask

Various Scriptures

To begin, we need to ask another more basic question: “Is there anyone today with all of our technology who has never heard of Jesus?” The answer to that is a loud “Yes!” There are millions who have never heard of Jesus. Another variety of this question is, “Is there anyone today who has never heard the Gospel?” There are people who have never heard the Gospel in Powell TN! There are people who attend church every week who have never clearly heard the Gospel!

When we talk about those who are reached and unreached with the Gospel we use the phrase “people groups.” What is a people group? Let me give you the official definition. *A people group is the largest group through which the Gospel can flow without encountering barriers of understanding and acceptance.* Some of those *barriers* of understanding and acceptance would be language, customs, and worldviews. There are 11,498 people groups in the world. Of those 11,498 people groups, there are 6,803 people groups that have less than 2% of the population that are evangelical Christian. Of the 6,803 unreached people groups, there are 3,040 that are not only unreached but also unengaged by any Christian mission efforts. Of the 3040 unreached and unengaged people groups, 323 of them have a population above 100,000. [Source, *GSEC Reports, August 2016* – IMB web site]

Our last point in the message will address the urgency of reaching the unreached (even in the USA), but the focus of the message will be those who have never heard of Jesus or the Gospel.

There are many Christians that don’t have a clue how to answer the question relating to the eternal destiny of those who have never heard the Gospel. I remember when I was in seminary; Kathy and I were sitting in a class at the church we attended that was made up of mostly seminary students and their spouses. This question about what happens to those who have never heard of Jesus was brought up. It was sad that so many of these future pastors and pastors’ wives didn’t have a clue. They had plenty of speculation and opinions, but very few had a biblical answer. I remember one young wife who thought she had it all figured out. She said that those who had never heard would be treated like little children who die and would be accepted into heaven. Many in the group thought that made sense and sounded right. One of my friends in that class who was more outspoken than me, Phil Glisson, said something like this: “That’s crazy! If that were true, why would we ever send missionaries to them? If they are going to heaven if they never hear, let’s stop them from ever hearing the Gospel.” Suddenly those in the class began to see the foolishness of the view that they will be treated as little children who die (we will analyze that view a little later in the message).

The answer to this skeptic’s question is not just for skeptics, but for some believers who lack an urgency in getting the Gospel to the unreached because they do not have a biblical view of the lostness of those who have never heard the Gospel.

I. The Answers We Must Reject

What are some of the most common answers to the question, “What happens to those who never hear of Jesus or the Gospel?”

A. Universalism

This answer simply says that Jesus' death was for everyone (whether they savingly believe in Jesus or not), and therefore everyone is already saved. No one goes to hell whether they have heard of Jesus or not, whether they are Christian or some other religion or no religion – they are all saved. This view sees evangelism as simply telling people what they already have so they can rejoice. I'm not going to take a lot of time to deal with this one. I will simply quote John 3:18 (ESV): "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." Revelation 21:8: "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." There are scores of verses we use to refute the false teaching of universalism, but those two representative verses will suffice. Universalism simply does not stand up to the Scripture.

B. Inclusivism

This view was mentioned in an earlier message. It is sometimes called, "The Wider Mercy" view. It is similar to Universalism but slightly different. Universalism says everyone is saved. Inclusivism says that those from other religions are saved by Jesus' sacrifice if they are sincere and true to their own religion. For example, if a person is a sincere Buddhist, they are saved by Christ even though they may never have heard of Him. That view is very much contradictory to the Scripture. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. It is not faith that saves; it is faith in Christ and His finished work on Calvary that saves. Faith is no better than the object of our faith. If the object of one's faith is not Jesus Christ and all He accomplished on the cross, that faith is worthless as to salvation. John 1:12: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." The "Him" is Jesus Christ, not the Allah of Islam or one of the hundreds of thousand Hindu Gods or the false Jesus of the cults.

C. Hypothetical Foreknowledge

This view says that God will save those who have never heard based on His foreknowledge of how they would have responded if they had heard the gospel. Since God knows all things, He knows how each person who dies, in let's say Northern China, would have responded had they heard. I have to quickly reject that one. As the Scripture talks about judgment, God deals with what *has* happened, not what *might have* happened. To have foreknowledge of an event that never will happen is a logical impossibility.

D. The Innocent Native View

This is the view that we dealt with in the introduction. It says that if a person hasn't heard the Gospel, they aren't responsible for not accepting it. This "ignorance is bliss" view is very dangerous. Some would put it like this, "How can God hold them accountable for what they don't know?" The Bible, however, teaches that all men are lost and under condemnation because of what they are, not because of what they know or do not know. The *Innocent Native* view would certainly discourage mission efforts. The fewer people who know about the gospel, the better off they are according to this view. Let's shut down the churches and destroy the Bibles and promote ignorance of the gospel because this way more would be saved. Based on this view, think about a missionary who goes to a remote village in Outer Mongolia and proclaims the Gospel to the whole village. Let's say that half of them receive Christ and the other half rejects Him. Were they better off before the missionary came or after? Before he came they were all saved because they had never heard. After he left, half were saved and half were now lost. I submit that if this view is true, they were, from eternity's perspective, better off before the missionary came. If this view is true, let's stop all missions giving, stop the short term trips and call the missionaries back home. As you leave tonight keep quiet about Jesus and never tell anyone else. Let's take the tracts out in the foyer and destroy them lest someone who has never heard the gospel should read one and then be held responsible.

Let's look at this view in light of Scripture. The gospel doesn't bring danger to previously ignorant and thereby innocent souls. All descendants of Adam were born with a soul that is dead to God and with an Adamic (sinful) nature. The default mode for all mankind is separation from God. 1 Corinthians 15:22a says "For as in Adam all die..." Those who reject the gospel were already infected by the deadly disease of sin before they ever heard and were already under condemnation. In reality, there are no innocent people out there. We were born in sin with a sin nature that we received from Adam. All that are apart from Christ are under condemnation because of their sin. John 3:18 (ESV): "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but

whoever does not believe is condemned *already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

II. The Justice of God

Most answers to this question we are dealing with contain something about the fairness of God. It goes something like this, “It would not be fair for God to allow someone to go to hell just because they never heard how to be saved.” The definition of fair that most people have in mind is that God must treat everyone equally. Based on that definition, is God really fair? As I read the Scriptures, I don’t find “fair” as one of God’s attributes. I looked in a Strong’s Concordance and didn’t see a single use of the word “fair” applied to God. In some translations (NKJV) Ezekiel 18:25 says that God’s ways are “fair,” but in the ESV it is more accurate in saying “just.” I am thankful that God is not fair. If God treated everyone equally based on what we deserve we would all fairly and equally spend eternity in hell. Some people say, “Why doesn’t God save everyone?” The real question is, “Why does God save anyone?” God is not fair by our definition of fair; God is just. Someone may bring up the passage in Acts 10:34 that says God is no respecter of persons or as the NKJV says *does not show partiality*. When you look however at the context of that, he is not talking about fairness as we think of it. He is talking about the fact that God saves all who come to Him from every people group. Acts 10:34-35 (ESV): “So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’”

Let’s look at God’s justice. Can God be just and still allow those who have never heard to go to hell? I am absolutely convinced that the answer is “yes.” Let’s examine the justice of God.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4: “For I proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.”

Nehemiah 9:33: “However, You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.”

Isaiah 45:21b (NKJV): “...and there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior.”

Acts 3:14 (NKJV): “But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.”

Romans 3:26: “for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

1 John 1:9 (ESV): “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

That’s only a partial listing of the verses that emphasize the justice of God. The word translated “just” when applied to God in the Old Testament means right in decisions, righteous. The word in the New Testament when applied to God means basically the same thing – to dispense right justice. When we say that God is just, we are saying that He is right and righteous in all He does, and his dispensing of justice is always right. We are going to see later in this message that God is just in his condemnation of those who have never heard because He gave them what theologians call “general revelation” (through creation and conscience) and they did not respond to him. The justice of God is manifested in the condemnation of all who are not in Christ.

III. The Mercy of God

God is under no obligation to save anyone. He would still be just if he condemned every descendent of Adam to hell for all eternity. That is what we deserve and that would be pure justice. But God is also a merciful God. I love Ephesians 2 where God tells us that apart from Christ we were dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God, and children of wrath. Then listen to Ephesians 2:4-5: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” Mercy is God making a provision so that we do not receive what we deserve. No one is entitled to mercy. God does not extend His mercy to everyone (get rid of that false concept of fairness). Romans 9:15: “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” That verse really bothers some folks and

even seems “un-American.” So many people believe that God is required to give mercy to every human on the planet. God owes mercy to no one? If mercy were owed, it would no longer be mercy; it would be justice. God sent His only begotten Son to take the wrath of God that we deserved on the cross so that God could be merciful to those who savingly believe on Christ. He can be merciful and still be just because the wage for their sin has been paid by the blood of Jesus Christ.

IV. The Truth That Is Universal

When God judges those who have never heard the Gospel, He will do so on the basis of the fact that they have received what theologians call “general revelation.” In Romans 1 & 2, Paul is building a case to prove that everyone who stands before God in judgment will be without excuse when God pronounces His judgment. When those who have never heard the gospel stand before the Great White Throne of Judgment, what hinders them from saying, “We have an excuse; we had no light, no truth”? They have no excuse because they had the light of general revelation. What is general revelation? Let’s look at Romans 1 & 2.

A. The Inner Knowledge of God’s Existence

Atheism is unnatural. God puts within us the innate knowledge that He is. Romans 1:19: “because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.” Nelson Price in his book, *The Emmanuel Factor*, told about a friend who owned a large trucking company that had offices in approximately 150 cities. In considering a person for employment, they gave a polygraph (lie detector) test. One of the questions the operator asked every person taking the test was “Do you believe there is a God?” He said that in *EVERY* case that a professing atheist said “no” the test showed that he was lying [page 15]

All mankind is the recipient of some light – the light of the innate knowledge that God is.

B. The Observation of Creation

Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Creation screams out, “Made by God!” The whole of creation is a marvelous theater that gives evidence of the Creator. The Psalmist said the same thing in the Old Testament in Psalm 19:1: “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.” Simply observing creation is enough to make one know there is a creator who deserves worship. Why do some who have never heard refuse to worship Him?

Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who *suppress* the truth in unrighteousness.” That word “suppress” means to hold down, to refuse something its natural place. When that happens, false religion begins to develop. Romans 1:21-23: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

Judgment is based on knowledge to which one has or has not responded. Those who have never heard are without excuse because they have not worshipped the one true God who is revealed within and through creation. Remember, general revelation doesn’t save, it reveals that we need to be saved and it is the basis for judgment. They will receive God’s wrath not because God is unjust, but because as Romans 1:18 says of their ungodliness and unrighteousness in suppressing God’s revealed truth. Those who respond to the truth are given more truth that can lead to salvation. In Acts, we see that responding to the light one has, leads to salvation in the Ethiopian Eunuch, Cornelius, and Lydia.

C. The Conscience That Is Universal

Romans 2:14-15: “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.” Earlier in the chapter, he has said that the Jews have the law and will be judged by how they measured up to it. We know that none measured up and all fell short. They did have light or truth however. What about the gentiles? They had the law written in them – in their conscience. For example, a man in Outer Mongolia

comes home and complains how his neighbor lied to him. That shows from his conscience that he knows that lying is wrong. Then he lies to his wife. He is condemned by his own standard. Romans 2:1: “Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”

All the lost will be judged based on the amount of knowledge they had and suppressed. Just as there are degrees of reward in heaven, there are degrees of judgment in hell. Those who have suppressed the most truth will be judged the harshest. Luke 12:47-48a: “And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few.” Jesus also spoke of some cities that it would be more tolerable for in the day of judgment because they had not received as much light (Matthew 11:23-24). Those who have never heard the gospel will not be condemned for rejecting truth they did not receive, but for rejecting truth they did receive.

V. The Urgency of Our Mandate

Our mandate is to go! Romans 10:14-15: “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’” The Father sent His Son and the Son sent His church to take the gospel to every creature. Mark 16:15: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’”

If the church was doing its job, the question about those who have never heard would be a moot one. We have a mandate from God to go.

Conclusion

This is not just hypothetical stuff. There are billions of people who have little or no access to the gospel and God’s ordained way to bring the lost to Himself is through the proclamation of the gospel and then the acceptance of the gospel. To fail to go makes us disobedient. We must get the gospel to those who have never heard. It is urgent!

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NKJV (New King James Version)

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