

What Happens to People Who Never Hear the Gospel?

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Date: 08 June 2016

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[0:00] Well, I want to speak to you this evening on a topic that I would imagine some of us have thought about over the years.

! Think about maybe family members, friends, or even people far away from us! What happens? To the people that never hear the gospel.

What becomes of them? I don't know why when I was growing up, late 40s, early 50s, they always talked about the pygmies in Africa.

We have to reach the pygmies. I've never seen a pygmy. My parents always talked about the poor pygmies in Africa and I had to finish my food because the kids were starving in China.

I cleaned my plate tonight because there's kids and I don't know how that helps them. My parents had that all figured out. When it comes to the matter of salvation, the Bible is very ironclad clear.

[1:11] Acts 4.12 says, And there is salvation in no one else. Talking about Jesus, of course. John 14.6 says, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through me.

I was amazed when liberal theologians say, you know, Jesus never said he was the exclusive way to heaven. Really? And then they also say, Jesus never said he was the Messiah.

Remember the woman at the well of Sychar? I know Messiah is coming. And Jesus said, I who speak to you am he. That's pretty definitive. The Lord Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father and the Father's heaven.

There is no plan B. However, men and women have been trying to come up with a plan B ever since Christ was crucified on Calvary.

The gospel of Christ is the only true saving good news. And we do know that false gospels abound.

[2:33] They're everywhere. And in fact, Paul wrote about that in Galatians. But only the gospel of Christ saves. The true gospel.

And the Bible makes it very clear that we are saved by justification. It is justification by faith.

Justification is a legal declaration that only the judge can make. The judge being God the Father.

He legally declares that we're saved.

We don't earn it. We don't deserve it. He declares it. It's a one-time act in an instant of time. And to me it's very clear. But there has been a titanic shift in this foundational doctrine.

Especially in the last half of the 20th century. And in the beginning years of the 21st century. Which we find ourselves in now.

[3:38] The prevailing theology relative to heaven and to death. Particularly in America.

This isn't so much in Asia and Africa and some other places. Particularly the persecuted world. But in America. The prevailing belief system is not justification by faith.

It is justification by death. Well, Uncle Henry died. He's in heaven. Well, tell me about it. Well, he was on death row. You know. He's been there for.

Ever since he murdered his mother with an axe. But, you know. They believe it's the life process.

Born. You live your life. You die. You go to heaven. And it's justification by death.

That error is embraced across our land. It has infiltrated a lot of churches. That even call themselves evangelical.

[4:42] It is a lie from the pit. I always remember Charles Stanley. A message that he preached 40 years ago. And talked about one way. And he said he couldn't remember how many times this had happened to him.

But a woman would come to him in the church. And my husband and son saved. He didn't come to church. He's lost as he can be. The only thing to do with it. I've tried to talk to him. He's not interested. Would you go talk to him?

And I go talk to him. And he's not interested. I don't need it. You know. And he dies. And the wife comes to me and says, You know, my husband was a good man.

He kept the lawn mowed. Kept clothes on our back. Food. Worked hard. He's a good man. And God does not let good people go to hell.

And I want you to preach his funeral. You know. And that's it. And Saucier fell in our... His wife was a staunch member. If I called her name, you'd all know it.

[5:44] I just can't remember who it is right now. But she was a staunch believer. Her husband never came. Do anything to do with it. And I asked Ed. I said, what are you going to do? He said, don't worry about it. I'll handle it.

Okay, you know. I can't remember the guy's name. He got up. Ed got up here and said, Boy, if old Harvey come out of that coffin, he'd tell you, you need Jesus. Boy, he would tell you right now. You all. And they were just saying, Amen in the family. Thought that was a great message. It's hard to swallow in the post-modern culture that churches buy into all this.

We live in an age of tolerance where it has become shameful to question or challenge someone just about in any arena.

I mean, you know, boys using girls' bathrooms, you know. We're out of favor if we challenge that. But this is especially so on matters of faith. Well, how dare you question a person's salvation or their relationship to God.

[6:46] In this culture, all faiths are acceptable. So we who exclusively believe in salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and by His finished work, we are branded the intolerant ones.

We don't have tolerance. And let me tell you something. There are churches in this community that have put that brand on this church. I'm telling you.

I could name it. They've put that brand on this church. But this all begs a question, and this question has been around for millennia, what happens to people that have never heard the gospel?

And that's an interesting question. I've heard it many times from lost people who during a witnessing encounter want to shift the focus from themselves to someone else.

If I have them say that to me, they'll say, well, now wait a minute. What about that guy in Africa that's never heard? He's never heard what you're telling me. And I have both a short-term answer and a long-term answer for that question.

[7:52] A short answer is, you know what? We're sitting in the middle of America here. Let's not worry about the person that's never heard right now. Let's worry about you because you've heard.

What are you going to do about the gospel? Now, my long-term answer is really the focus of the message tonight. That's what we're talking about.

It is estimated that there are 4.5 billion people on this planet who have never heard the gospel. There are at least 6,000 people groups who have never seen the Word of God in their language. This church has printed some Bibles for some of those people groups and we're going to do it again. At least one of those people groups has well over a million people. In North Yemen, there are 8 million people.

Of them, it is estimated that 20 to 30 are Christians out of 8 million people. The Bedouins of Algeria, and I've been there, are 1.4 million strong and there are zero believers among them.

[9:10] Now, can you imagine that? What does the Bible have to say about them? Well, as we often do when we are faced with a challenging question, we turn to the Apostle Paul.

And as we often do when turning to Paul, we turn to the Book of Romans. the Magna Carta, the cathedral, I think, of Scripture. And it is there that we discover the truths concerning those who have never heard of Jesus.

And I will list them for you in our series of truths. And truth one is this. All people have knowledge of God.

Everyone has a knowledge that there's somebody out there more powerful than them. God is in the business of revealing Himself. By the way, we have a theological name for that general revelation.

God reveals Himself and that is made clear in a few verses in this magnificent book of Romans, chapter 1, beginning in verse 18.

[10:25] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth and unrighteousness because that which is known about God is evident within them.

For God made it evident to them. 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.

I had a guy challenge me. How do you know there's a God? I said, because you're not standing here talking to each other. And by the way, I said it took, you know, 137 muscles and trillions of cells working in your brain and you're vocal for you to even ask that question.

That just didn't happen. The Spirit of God authored this passage and says that God has made Himself evident to all men.

And that's generic, ladies, men and women. Though God is Spirit, He has revealed His invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature to the human race.

[11:45] And God has chosen to do that through the created world. What the psalmists say, even the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament, His handiwork.

Out at my place where I can turn off all electric lights inside and out, and I can look up, you know, and see that milky way, milky way, you see the fingerprint of God.

You just do. God has chosen to do this through the created world. I know a few months back I was sitting in the cool of the morning on a Saturday morning and I'm talking to the Lord and I realized I had, you know, compared to the earth or the universe, a very narrow field of vision.

I could see some trees near the house there, leaves, birds, clouds in the sky, and I remember mentioning to the Lord that that would be enough right there to know that God exists.

Just seeing those few things from the vantage point of my back deck. And knowing that, I am like all men without excuse. I just acknowledge I know God exists because I'm seeing His work.

[13:00] So truth number one this evening is that all people have a certain degree of knowledge relative to the existence of God. Truth two, which is somewhat disturbing, all people reject God.

That's interesting because I'm talking to a group of people that are believers. Here's what Paul has to say though, continuing in chapter one, 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. All people at some point have rejected the true knowledge of God. That is a product of the fall in the Garden of Eden. Not the autumn, the fall, leap into sin.

Instead of seeking the true God, what did our parents do? Our grandparents going back to Adam 8. They ran and they hid. They ate the forbidden fruit and they ran when they heard God coming.

[14:26] And by the way, that's the second person of the Trinity in the Garden, the Lord Jesus Christ. They ran and they hid. Which begs the question, where do you go to hide from God?

You know, help me out here. Jonah tried it and he said, I went down to the roots of the mountains and you were there. God was there. And by the way, we didn't know there were mountains in the ocean or the sea until 300 years ago.

They should have read Jonah. It's like we didn't know the earth was round and yet the Bible says he hung the sphere on nothing. It talks about the rivers in the ocean. That's the warm water currents that go right by Scotland, my wife and my ancestral home.

Scotland's even with Alaska. The only reason Scotland's not Alaska is the warm water currents of the North Atlantic. All that's in the Bible. And yet, Adam and Eve, they tried to hide.

And that was a sin. The second sin they committed was actually thinking there's someplace we can get that surely God can't find us. But men and women have been trying to hide from God ever since that sin was introduced into the human race.

[15:40] The nature we inherited from our original parents rebels against the knowledge and glory of God. I hid from God for 30 years. So I know what I'm talking about.

And you know what? I didn't find him. He found me. He found me. At least another question, if people worship incorrectly, but sincerely, and we hear this often, does that count for nothing?

Well, the short answer to that is no. But the longer answer is no. It doesn't. Sincerity is not the issue here. We do not get credit for worshiping a false god in spite of the fact we do it sincerely.

I've got some great Muslim friends. They bow to Mecca five times a day and they're very sincere about it. And very lost. This leads to truth number three.

All people are guilty before God. A brief examination of some fundamental truths in Romans chapter 3 explains this. There's none righteous, not even one.

[16:47] How many righteous are there? There's none. There is none who understands.

Understands what? The way to God. There is none who seeks for God.

They have all turned aside. Together they have become useless. There is none who does good, not even one. And here we have the words of God.

And by the way, all those Paul copied out of the Old Testament. And with these words, God has made His case and it is very decisive. All people in every culture, in every nation, tongue, tribe, and race are guilty before a holy God.

And that's why Paul could write in Romans 3.19 every mouth is silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Every mouth.

But this still begs the question, what about the innocent guy in darkest Africa who dies never having heard the gospel or even knowing that the gospel exists?

[18:00] Does God send such an innocent man to hell? And my answer may surprise you at first.

And you might even want to storm up here.

But you've got to give me a few moments. So let me just say this. God has never and will never send an innocent man to hell or a woman.

He will not do it. The innocent guy in Africa or Asia or America will not go to hell. Additionally, they have no need of a savior.

Why? Because they're innocent. Christ said, I did not come to call the righteous to repentance. I came to save sinners. Now most of you know where I'm headed with this innocent guy story.

He doesn't exist. He doesn't exist. He cannot be found in Africa. He cannot be found in Asia. He cannot be found anywhere else in the world, including this room.

[19:04] There are no innocent people in the world. God says all people are guilty before God and therefore all people need a savior and therefore we, that's the church, should invest our lives heavily on gospel missions to tell the lost they have hope.

God uses the church as the means to reach the lost. He uses us. Truth for all people are condemned for rejecting God.

Paul concludes his message on the sinfulness of man by saying, therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight.

You know, it will be declared innocent based on what you've done or based on what I've done.

Every human is guilty before God and without the inward ability to change that condition on their own.

Now, many people try, they try to work out their own salvation, they try to dig themselves out of this condition, but they discover they're digging themselves deeper and deeper.

[20:20] There is no human work by which we can make ourselves acceptable to God. Adam and Eve learned that lesson the hard way, didn't they?

They ate the forbidden fruit, their eyes were open, and for the first time, they realized they were naked. And they were embarrassed and they didn't want God to see them in that condition, so they ran and they hid.

And then, they created the first human religion on earth. They created fig leaf religion. the first Baptist church of the Garden of Eden fig leaf religion.

They went and they sewed fig leaves together. Now, you ever think about that? And I've said this before, when you open your Bible, you've got all these black letters, right? And between those black letters, there's a little white space.

A lot went on in those white spaces. Our Bible says they went and sewed fig leaves. Well, what is that telling us? They had to make some type of awe, I think that's AWL. They had to have like some vine or something as thread.

[21:32] I don't know how big they were. They had to find some pretty good sized leaves and they started sewing them to hide their shame. So, while they're hiding, they're doing all this work.

This is human effort. What are they trying to achieve here? The fig leaf religion. they're trying to get to the point where they are once again acceptable to God.

Let's work our way back into His presence and into His favor. We can once again walk in the cool of the evening with them as soon as we finish these clothes.

It was a religion. Remember, religion is always man's efforts to reach God and they always fail.

Christ in Christianity is not a religion.

Christianity is God reaching down to mankind, men and women, and He succeeds. That's the basic difference here. So, in Paul's day, people are trying to come to God, and how are they trying to do that?

[22:37] Keeping the law, especially embodied in the Ten Commandments, if we could just keep the law, we'll be okay. I love my Wesleyan friends.

You worked around them for decades, and they're great people, and they love the Lord. But I get with them on eternal security. It was tragic, you know, when Tom White died, they sat around and said, I wish we believed like Tom Holland.

You know, but I have fun with them, because I said, well, you guys believe you can lose yourself.

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, is it like if you throw your chewing gum on the sidewalk, no, no, no, it's got to be serious.

So I said, it's got to be a real major deal. Yeah, yeah. I said, what if you violated the greatest commandment 24 hours a day your whole life?

Would that be enough? Because you've never loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We've loved Him with part of it, but we've never fulfilled the greatest commandment in this life.

[23:45] Would that be enough? Well, they don't want to answer that. They do not want to go there. They want to do that. The law condemns. The law was intended to condemn.

There was nothing given in the law of God, and that stretches over five books in the Pentateuch.

There was never anything given by which you can be saved. It was intended to condemn and drive people to a Savior who has kept the law.

And of course, that's the Lord Jesus Christ. And there had to have been tears in Paul's eyes when the Spirit of God had him write this, all people know God.

All people reject God. All people are guilty before God. And all people stand condemned for rejecting God. And he knew his brothers had rejected the true God.

He said, would that I would go to hell for eternity so that my brothers could be saved. Well, truth five, let's get into some positives here. God has made a way of salvation for the lost, of which every one of us at one time were in that condition, weren't we?

[25:03] Romans 3, verse 21 and 22. But apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.

Wow, if you're going to memorize something, memorize that. That'd be worth memorizing. You know, when Martin Luther was in a monastery, I keep wanting to say convict, but that wouldn't be right. when he was in a monastery, of course, Martin Luther, he struggled with saying, oh man, and they'd have confession.

And we're talking about in the 1500s, the early 1500s. I realize now if you get a bunch of Roman Catholic priests together, you could have some real problems. But I don't think it was like that back then.

So he's in a monastery, and they had to go to confession every evening before lights out. And lights out were like at 6 in the evening.

So they go to confession. Well, you know, the first guy going in and said, well, you know, yesterday, I coveted Brother Rouse's mashed potatoes.

[26:25] Or, last night, I snuck a can in my room, and I lit it under my covers, and I read a scroll after we were supposed to have the lights on, turn it out, all the candles, put out the candles.

You know, how much trouble can you get in a monastery in 1509 or whatever it was? Martin Luther, he would confess for five hours.

He would confess for eight hours there was one time on record where he confessed for 15 hours.

And then he went back to his room and he remembered a sin that he had not confessed and he went back and he wanted to start over and do 15 hours.

He agonized over this. And, you know, the fathers that ran this deal, they thought he was wanting to get out of work. He didn't want to mock the floors, he didn't want to do whatever he assigned work

with.

They thought he was a malingerer. That's how he pronounced that work. But he really wasn't. He really wasn't. Well, you know what happened to Martin Luther? He looked down one day and he read, and I'll read it to you again.

[27 : 40] This is what he read. But now, first of all, there's great study if you want to look up the word but now or but God. That makes a great study. But now, apart from the law, apart from rules and rigid regulations, the righteousness, and then this really hit him.

Not his righteousness, not ours, the righteousness of God. He froze. He said, wait a minute. This is talking about God's righteousness.

And it's been manifested, been revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. They pointed to it, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who are weak.

And you know what? The Christian era started, or restarted, and he left Roman Catholicism. This launched the Reformation.

Those two verses of Scripture launched the Reformation, and we are a product, this church, of the Reformation that happened in Northern Europe. Amazing.

[28 : 51] Christ lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and made the way for men and women to be reconciled to our holy God.

God has made the way. We're out here sowing seed leaves together. We're out here going down to the roots of the mountains, you know, until God comes into our life.

God made the way. We didn't make the way. Christ made the way. And no, please, it is not a way, it is the way. That's why Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, the life.

That's a little Greek word, *ina*, and it means I am the exclusive way. There's no other, you can search creation, search the universe, there's no other way. Mohammed's not it, Hindu's not it, Christian's not it, Confucius isn't it, Buddha's not it, New Age is not it.

I am the exclusive way, I'm the exclusive truth, Dr. Schaefer said true truth, and I'm the only life, I'm exclusive. People say, well, you guys in the evangelicals, you preach an exclusive exclusive, exclusive is a word.

[30 : 04] Yeah, we do. Or my favorite, well, you teach a bloody religion. Yeah, we do. Not our blood, his. ways. It is the way. Now, we still need to wrestle with this question about those who've never heard.

And they'll be covered by my final two points tonight. Truth six, people cannot come to God apart from faith in Christ Jesus. Cannot come to God apart from faith in Christ.

Christ. And I said at the start, there is no other name under heaven by which we are saved. I've heard people say, well, I believe in God, I just don't believe in Jesus.

If you don't believe in Jesus, you don't believe in God. You might believe in a God, little g, but you don't believe in the God of the Bible. That's almost as aggravating as when people say, well, God is I perceive him to be.

It doesn't matter how you perceive him. What matters is what that book says about him. How does it reveal him? There's no other name under heaven by which we're saved. And that being true then, what about those who've never heard?

[31 : 13] What do we do about them? Well, somebody needs to go and tell them about Christ. And who has God set apart to go and do the telling?

And the short answer is, well, you know, missionaries. But is that what God said? And the accurate answer is actually in truth number seven. Christ commands, underline that word, that the church make the gospel known to all peoples.

He sends the church. Now, I know I'm preaching to the choir, and actually when you look around, there is some choir members here. you all know the church is not brick and mortar, right?

If a tornado comes through here Saturday, we're going to have church Sunday. We may be on the parking lot, we may be at my farm, we may borrow First Baptist or First Wesleyan, and they'll be available if they have been destroyed.

But we're going to have church because the church is people. We are rocking around with the holy of holies inside us. We can have church anywhere we find ourselves because God is with us wherever we find ourselves.

[32:34] So we are to make the gospel known to all people. The people of the church, believers, are to make the gospel known. And who is to fill that? And the answer is the church working together is to fulfill this role.

I remember I was teaching the older women years ago. I'll tell you how long ago Geneva Stark was in there. And they said, you know, we're too old to go. I said, no you're not.

You go on your knees in your bedroom in prayer. You go to China and then you go to Vietnam and then you go to the Arab world and you can do that through your prayers.

Lifting up the other people that are sent. This is what the Lord said in Romans 10:13. Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now that verse should be crystal clear, but listen as the Spirit of God continues.

How then will they call on Him in whom they've not believed? Well, give us the answer, Lord. Okay. How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?

[33:46] And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent? We're in the business of sending. And some of us go.

You guys have been. There's several people in this room. I've been in 46 countries. 47 if you include Louisiana. It's real easy, isn't it? To say, well, send the preacher.

That's what we pay him for. But send the preacher. But the verse really says, send those who will then preach the good news to the lost.

Tell the good news. Explain the good news. That's all of us. That's all of us. Now, there's a little condition here or caution.

Don't manipulate people. I think we're way beyond those days. Well, if you'll say these words, you'll be saved. Now, you've got to mean them, but repeat after me.

[34:42] You know, we're a long way down the road, I think, from that. Let me give you God's plan of redemption. God sends His servants. His servants preach Christ.

Witness. Tell the good news. People hear. Some hear and believe.

You're not going to save everyone. Paul said, I've come that some might be saved. I came to this earth so some might be saved. Some people hear and they believe because God is calling believers out from darkness and placing them into light.

God is calling those believers forth. Everyone who calls is saved. And whoever comes to Christ, Christ said, I'm not going to drive you out.

If you come to me, I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you. I wish I had time to get into John chapter 6. Because Jesus preached this message to a mass of people.

[36:01] And you know what they said to him? He summarized his message with, you can't come to me unless the Father calls you. And when he said that, the crowd basically turned on him and said, this is a hard saying.

Who can understand that? Probably the saddest verse of Scripture in the world. It said, and many walked with him no more. And he was left with twelve and one of them was a devil.

Because he answered, you guys going to leave? Well, foot in mouth Peter, you know, every now and he came out with some good stuff. He says, Lord, you have the words of eternal life. We're not leaving. But that's a sad Scripture.

There were a lot of people, there are hundreds, and they turned and walked away. And you know what? People are still walking away. When we preach, teach an exclusive message, every believer in this room is a servant of Christ.

He sends his servants home. So we got to be willing to go. And some will get a airplane ticket and go. Some of you have already done that, some of us.

[37:18] And others, you go with your prayers, you go with your money. It's all working together for good. All works together for good.

Thank you.