

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO NEVER HEAR THE GOSPEL

Last week we began our new Quest series titled: “You Asked For It.”

You guys emailed me scores of questions,
that you wanted me to answer.

And we began last Sunday with the following:

Question 1: Isn't it arrogant for us to believe that Christianity is the only true path to heaven? ... If you believe God can do all things, it isn't that much of a stretch to believe He could offer up several different pathways to heaven. He created all of us, He loves all of us, it seems to me a much bigger stretch that He'd omit some simply because they were born and raised in cultures who were following one of the other paths.

I responded to this very good question last week in a number of ways, primarily by saying that it is not arrogant to claim that Christianity is the only true path to God if, in fact, Christianity is the only true path to God.

So, the real question is not is Christianity arrogant,
but is Christianity true?

C. S. Lewis made the same point in one of his essays.

C. S. Lewis: Christianity claims to give an account of facts — to tell you what the real universe is like. Its account of the universe may be true, or it may not, and once the question is really before you, then your natural inquisitiveness must make you want to know the answer. If Christianity is untrue, then no honest man will want to believe it, however helpful it might be; if it is true, every honest man will want to believe it, even if it gives him no help at all.

What Lewis says about Christianity is true about all religions.
They all claim to give the facts concerning spiritual reality.

And the reason,
 the only reason to believe one and not the other
 is because you come to the conclusion that one is true.

And if you come to the conclusion that one is true and the others are not,
 you would not want to believe the ones that are false, and
 you wouldn't want anyone else to, either.

Last week I presented the foundational beliefs of the world's major religions
 and we saw that the truth claims of Christianity are so different
 from the truth claims of other religions
 that Christianity and the other religions of the world
 cannot be reconciled or
 thought of as simply different paths to the same destination.

So, for the sake of intellectual integrity,
 we should investigate the claims of the world's religions
 determine which one is true,
 and then be man enough to say:
 I believe this path is the true path to God and I stand by my decision.

Clip: Dalai Lama

For the rest of the morning I want to do three things.

- (1) Continue last week's talk by pointing out some implications if you believe that Jesus is just one of many ways to God.
- (2) Talk about why it's so hard for 21st century Westerners to claim that there is only one way.
- (3) Deal with the question: Will people who don't hear about Jesus go to hell?

(1) WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPLICATIONS IN BELIEVING THAT JESUS IS JUST ONE OF MANY WAYS TO GOD?

Let's assume that in spite of everything we looked at last week,
 you're still inclined to believe that Christianity –

in particular, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus –
is not THE way to God, but one of many ways to God.

Sometimes we can accept a belief until we see its implications
and if we decide we can't live with those implications,
we then know we need to revise what we believe.

So, if you believe that Jesus is only one of the ways that God has provided
for us to be made right with him:

(A) You Diminish Christ.

Jesus said:

John 14.6: I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the
Father except through me.

If you believe there are other ways to God,
you make Jesus out to be a liar or a lunatic or, at best, terribly confused.

And you diminish his claim to be THE way and THE truth and THE life,
and you make him but a way, a truth and a life.

Clip: Oprah

And frankly, if he is wrong about who he is,
I don't know why you would listen to him about anything else.

Anyone with such delusions of grandeur
who believes he is a unique figure in all of history
and who asserts that no one can come to God but through him
if there are really many ways to come to God,
that person, again in my humble opinion,
cannot be trusted to tell us the truth about spiritual reality.

One of Lewis' most famous quotes.

C. S. Lewis: A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus
said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on
the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or he would be the

devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

If Jesus was not who he claims he was,
 the way and the truth and the life,
 you diminish him to the point
 that he is so mistaken about himself
 that you cannot even believe he is a great teacher
 much less a true way to God.

(B) You Demonize God.

If the death of Jesus was not required to save us,
 if there are other ways to God that did not necessitate
 the horrific suffering that Christ experienced on the cross,
 but God the Father sent him anyway,
 knowing what would happen,
 then God would be guilty of a horrific crime.

We can't comprehend the depth of the relationship between God the Father
 and God the Son.
 But it goes at least as deep as the love and concern we have for our children.

Which of you would send your son to be persecuted, mocked, whipped with
 thirty-nine lashes and then nailed on a cross naked to die the most painful
 and shameful death the Roman Empire could devise
 if it was not absolutely necessary?

To believe there are other pathways to God,
 you must believe
 that the death of Jesus was not necessary for us to become right with God,
 but the Father decided to send him anyway to be tortured and killed.

Believe there are other ways to God
 and you turn God the Father into a monster
 who is guilty of one of the greatest acts of child abuse the world has
 ever seen.

(C) You Make The Apostles into Fools.

History tells us that all of the apostles were martyred for preaching Christ, except John who died in exile on the island of Patmos.

What fools – if Jesus is one of many ways to God!

The early followers of Jesus were not killed for telling others to love their neighbors or that they should live virtuous lives.

They were martyred for preaching that Jesus is Lord and Savior.

Most other religions were not persecuted the way Christianity was in the first three centuries AD in the Roman Empire.

If any of them were efficacious in saving our souls and reconciling us to a holy God, why not preach them instead of Christ and save your life?

Look what Peter told the high priest,
speaking about Jesus.

Acts 4.12: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

The early followers of Jesus believed he was the unique Savior of the world and they believed there was no other.

They not only believed it,
they preached it, and
they died for it.

If wrong about Jesus being the only way to God,
these men were not great heroes but great fools.

(D) You Should Tell Those Who Are Being Persecuted For Their Faith in Christ to Apostatize.

Christians are being persecuted all over the world.

They are imprisoned, beaten, tortured and murdered for their faith in Christ.

Should we tell them to renounce Christ

and adopt whatever the religion of the land is?

If not, why not?

If faith in Jesus is not necessary,
 why suffer for that faith and
 why remain true to Christ?

Instead of their faithfulness being noble,
 you make it out to be nothing but foolishness
 if there are many religions that lead to God.
 They should pick one of those
 and save themselves.

These are some of the implications of denying that Jesus alone saves
 and saying that other religions are valid pathways to God.

We are not denying that other religions may contain some truth
 or that their followers may be decent human beings.

But make Jesus one of many paths to God
 and you make him a liar or a lunatic;
 you make God the Father a despicable monster;
 you make the apostles ridiculous fools; and
 you make the suffering of persecuted Christians unnecessary and
 pointless.

(2) WHY IS IT SO HARD FOR 21ST CENTURY WESTERNERS TO CLAIM THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO GOD?

Let me give you two reasons.

The first applies to people in any era.
 The second is more germane for our western culture,
 especially in our postmodern setting.

The first.

(A) You may be more of a “gracer” than a “truther.”

Look at

John 1.14: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In Jesus we find grace and truth.
Not one instead of the other;
not one more than the other.
But both together.

That's one of the reasons
Jesus was so effective in bringing people to the Father.

You and I don't have that kind of balance.
We lean more to the truth side or more to the grace side.

If you're a truther,
you want people to know the truth,
and you don't mind telling people the truth.
You believe what Jesus said – that the truth will set you free –
so you want to make certain people hear the truth,
from you or from someone else.

The problem with truthers
is that we can be too harsh
and we can tell the truth when people aren't ready to hear it
and we can end up pushing people away.

If you're a gracer,
you want people to feel loved and accepted.
You know that people don't respond to truth very well if they feel
threatened,
and you saw how Jesus changed the lives of sinners
by spending time with them and treating them as persons of worth.

The problem with gracers
is that we can be afraid of telling the truth.
We don't want to say or do anything
that makes people feel uncomfortable.
We are so concerned about coming across as judgmental or condemning
that sometimes we don't tell people the truths that Jesus taught
and the truths they need to hear.

So, why is it hard for some of us to state there's only one way to heaven
and that way is Jesus?

Because our personality,
 our gracer predisposition makes it hard to tell people that
 Jesus Christ is the way and the truth and the life,
 even though he said that about himself.

I appreciate gracers.
 I try to be a person who loves and accepts people wherever they are.

But sometimes the most loving thing you can do is tell someone the truth
 they need to hear.
 And if you are too gracious to tell people what Jesus said about himself,
 that's not a strength and that's not Christ-like.
 It's a misunderstanding about what grace really is.

(B) We have been influenced by the spirit of our age.

Last week I said that when we state that what Christ revealed is the truth,
 we're not attacking people who hold different beliefs.

We're talking about whether what a religion teaches is true.
 And it's my contention that the world's religions,
 though they get some things right,
 are very far afield from what Jesus taught about God, the human
 predicament, himself and salvation.

And where they differ from Jesus,
 I'm willing to say Jesus is right
 and they are wrong.

In our time and culture it's very difficult to talk about truth claims
 without people misunderstanding what you're doing.

We live in an age that has made tolerance its highest cultural value.
 Practically, the worst accusation in our society that can be made about a
 person is that he or she is intolerant.

Of course, true tolerance is a virtue.

True tolerance is what's described in the statement attributed to

Voltaire: I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend to the death your right to say it.

But in our culture tolerance has come to mean something else.
It has come to mean that no truth claim is more valid than any other.

In *The Closing of the American Mind* Professor Allan Bloom writes:

Allan Bloom: Openness used to be the virtue that permitted us to seek the good by using reason. It now means accepting everything and denying reason's power.

Tolerance now doesn't mean everyone has a right to say what he believes.
Tolerance means no one saying that anyone else's views concerning morality or spirituality are wrong.

Tolerance now means accepting all views about reality as equally valid
not because they are equally true
but because they are meaningful to the people who hold them.

In politically correct, post-modern America
claim that your beliefs are right and that where others differ from you,
theirs are wrong,
even if you do so with kindness and respect,
and you open yourself to the charge of being intolerant, bigoted and
mean-spirited.

Rabbi Shmuley Boteach: I am absolutely against any religion that says one faith is superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. It's a way of saying that we are closer to God than you, and that's what leads to hatred.

No doubt there are times and there have been times
when religious differences have led to hatred, persecution and terrible
atrocities.

And we stand with the Rabbi in condemning that kind of evil.

But that doesn't mean that some philosophies and some religions
are not closer to the truth than others.

And it's not spiritual bigotry to say so.

Let's go back to the concept of being open.
In general that's a good thing.

But it's not an end in itself.
Look at this quote from

G. K. Chesterton: Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

What is solid,
what is true,
that's what we're looking for.

We can be tolerant of those who believe differently than we do
and we can support their right to believe what they believe
and proclaim whatever they desire.

But what we can't do is let a decadent western culture that has lost its way
and that doesn't believe there are any over-arching truths that apply to all
of us,
convince us that what God has revealed about himself is just one of many
truths
and that somehow it's intolerant or spiritual racism to speak the truth in
love.

Final question: Would any of you charge Jesus with being arrogant?
No? Well he is the one who claimed that he was the way and the truth
and the life.
If he's not arrogant for making that claim,
then why are Christians condemned for being arrogant
simply because we believe and repeat what he said about himself?

Let's go to another part of the question we've been looking at last week and
this week.

**“He (God) created all of us, He loves all of us, it seems to me a much
bigger stretch that He'd omit some simply because they were born
and raised in cultures who were following one of the other paths.”**

So, I think the question is:

(3) Will people who don't hear about Jesus go to hell?

Others of you asked this question, as well.

Let's break it down.

Question: Would God omit some simply because they were born some place where people follow another path and perhaps never hear about Christ?

Answer: No one goes to hell because they were born in the wrong place or because they never heard of Christ. People go to hell because they are sinners.

That may sound pedantic to you,
but it's a critically important starting place to deal with this question properly.

What does the Bible teach?

Romans 3.10: There is no one righteous, not even one.

What about my dear grandmother,
what about my hard-working, self-sacrificing father,
what about Mother Teresa,
and Paul says, "There is no one righteous, not even one."

Later in the chapter.

Romans 3.23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

All have sinned – and fall short of God's standard.

Rob, are you saying you think I'm a terrible sinner.
No, I don't think you're a terrible sinner.

I think you're a terrific sinner.
I think sinning is one of the things you and I do best.

And the fact that we don't even realize it
shows how shallow and fallen we are.

Sin is anything and everything that doesn't measure up to God's standard.
That includes actions, words, thoughts and motives.
And if you think, we'll I'm not that bad,
it's because you're not that good.

And what I mean by that
is that the greatest saints have always been those most aware of their
sinful hearts and how lost they are apart from forgiveness and grace.

The closer you get to God
the more aware you become of your sin.
And if you're not feeling your sin,
it's because you're much further from God than you imagine.

We are all sinners.

Romans 6.23: The wages of sin is death.

Sin separates us from God.
God is the source of life.
Separated from the source of life we will die,
physically in this world
and spiritually in the world to come.

Listen up, boys.

There is none who are righteous – no, not one.
Not you.
Not me.
And not the person who is trying to live a good life
but has never heard of Jesus.

And God would be just in condemning every one of us
and sending us away from his presence forever.

Why?

Because we are sinners.

I am a sinner.

I am a grievous sinner.

And I am deserving of hell.

And trying to be a good person won't save me.

Going to church won't save me.

Being religious and doing charitable deeds won't save me.

And those who are separated from God forever

are not omitted "simply because they were born and raised in cultures who were following one of the other paths."

They end up separated from God because of their sins.

Now, having said that,

here's where I may be too liberal for some of you.

Probably up to now,

last week and this week,

I've been too conservative for some of you.

I am going to tell you how it could be possible for someone who never hears of Jesus to be saved.

Dr. Robb did this once in a sermon,

and all hell broke loose.

I'm willing to take a shot at this,

if and only if you will listen very carefully to what I'm about to say right now.

I do not believe that anyone will be saved for any reason other than Jesus Christ died for his or her sins.

There is one Savior and his name is Jesus.

There is one act that saves people

and that is his death on the cross.

No one will be made right with God by living a good life or by religious or charitable deeds.

Ephesians 2.8-9: For by grace are you saved through faith ... **not by works**

....

**I do not believe that anyone will be made right with God
because they followed their religion faithfully.**

That again is salvation by works.

And besides I told you that I don't think the other religions lead to God,
so how can following them lead you to him?

No one will be saved because he has a good heart.

Clip: Joel Osteen – good heart

Jeremiah 17.9: The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?

Mark 10.18: No one is good except God alone.

**And, hear this, I believe if someone hears the Gospel preached
and rejects Jesus, they reject God's offer of salvation.**

John 3.36: Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects
the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.

Get it – you cannot go away from here thinking or telling others
that Rob said it doesn't matter if you believe in Jesus or not,
just live a good life and you'll be ok.

Just live a “good life” and trust in your own goodness
and you'll end up in hell.

You will

and so will someone who has never heard of Jesus.

If you want to know what arrogance is,

it's standing before God and trusting that you have lived a life so
righteous that you have met God's standards
and merit eternity in heaven.

**Then how can I say it might be possible for someone to be saved
if they never hear of Jesus?**

1. We know that some people will be in heaven who never heard of Jesus or believed in him.

Who?

Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, etc.
 These and others lived before the time of Jesus
 and so were not able to believe in him.
 Yet, we are certain they will be in heaven.

2. Why will these people be in heaven?

A. Because the death of Christ covered their sins.

How is that possible if it happened after they lived?

Because God is not bound by time.
 He lives in what Lewis calls the eternal present.

And the death of Christ for the sins of the world
 was a reality in the mind of God even before the Old Testament saints
 were born.

Revelation 13:8: ... the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain
 from the creation of the world.

B. They knew they were unrighteous in themselves and they trusted in God's grace.

Psalm 130 is a wonderful Old Testament declaration of this truth.

Psalm 130.3-4, 7-8:

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins,
 O Lord, who could stand?
 But with you there is forgiveness;
 therefore you are feared.
 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
 and in his word I put my hope.
 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
 for with the LORD is unfailing love
 and with him is full redemption.
 He himself will redeem Israel
 from all their sins.

3. It is possible for persons to be convicted of their sins without hearing about Christ.

People in many cultures have the sense that they are guilty before God. And it is possible that God's Spirit can convict people of their sins directly without their hearing the Gospel preached.

4. It is possible for persons who sense their guilt before God to believe that they cannot save themselves, to know that they need grace, and to ask God for that grace, and trust in nothing else.

Again, I have no reason from the Bible to think God cannot do this by the work of his Holy Spirit even without hearing about Christ.

What will happen to these people when they stand before God?

Will he say, Sorry, you didn't say, "And I trust in Jesus"?
Or will he say, "You are asking for my grace – let me show you what I did to answer that prayer,"
and then point them to Jesus?

I hope and I believe the latter.

Is it possible for persons to be saved who have never heard of Christ?

It's not an easy case to make from the Scriptures.

And I'm being up front with you about that.

We don't have time for me to point you to the passages that would seem to argue against it.

But I think it is possible.

Hear this – I think it is possible but not common.

Why do I say that?

Because the natural tendency of fallen human beings is to trust in their own righteousness.

It's to believe they've lived a good life,
that they haven't committed any really bad sins,
that they're better than most people.

And if that's what people trust in,
they will be lost.

If we had time, I could show you all kinds of reasons for believing that.
But go to – Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18.9-14)

Some of you – you're here trusting in your own goodness.

You've been in church for years,
maybe all your life,
and you came in here trusting in your own righteousness
and you'll leave trusting in your own righteousness,
even though you've heard me say
there is no salvation other than admitting your sinfulness
and asking for and trusting in the grace of God.

Grace is offensive to the human ego
and people don't come to it easily.

Another reason I say possible but not common
is because most of the world's religions teach people to trust in their
good deeds and their religiosity.
And trusting in self is the opposite
of trusting in God and his grace.

So, saying that it's possible does not mean it's common or likely
and it in no way diminishes the importance of sending missionaries
to other cultures and to people who have never heard of Christ.

People are much more likely to acknowledge their guilt,
feel their need for grace,
and trust solely in God's mercy
if they hear the truth proclaimed.

Hearing God's word can awaken our spiritually dull hearts,
it can cause us to recognize our sinfulness
and realize our need for grace.

And without hearing the Gospel,
it is possible but not often that people will do so.

Here's the Good News.
God is more gracious than we believe.

Here's the bad news.
The human heart is harder and more proud than we will admit.

God is more willing to receive us than we are to come to him.
But without hearing the good news of what he has done for us in Jesus,
it is hard for people to humble their hearts,
get rid of their pride,
quit trusting in themselves, and
ask for and cling solely to the grace of God.

If time, clip from Daly Show