

# What happens to good people who never hear about Jesus?

Romans 1:16-25

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There are around 20 major world religions which are subdivided into a total of 270 large religious groups. More countless small religions are out there and being created every day. While it brings much confusion, it does testify to the fact that many people in our world are trying to find a way to fill a “God-shaped hole” in their hearts.

The world prefers the belief that all religions are just different ways to the same God. In a post-modern, politically correct world that sounds nice and inclusive, but it is not true. Some will argue that all religions are fundamentally the same and are just different ways to the same God. This statement exposes that one has not spent enough time understanding the differences of world religions. They are drastically different. These different religions are ideas created by man to somehow explain the world around them and fill the God-shaped void in their lives. But only God can define the way to God, and only God can draw us to Himself.

## 1. God's Word is our source for answers

As Christians we are people of God's Word. It alone is our authority for life and godliness. If we have not set the lordship of God's Word over our lives, then we will be like those described in James 1:5-8 who, because of their doubt, were *“like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind . . . he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*

When faced with topics such as today's, we must not turn to our own logic or the ideas of the world to answer our questions. We must turn to God's Word to find the truth that we seek.

## 2. Jesus is the Only Way

As we prepare to answer the question, “What happens to good people who never hear about Jesus?” we first must understand that it is only through Jesus Christ that mankind can be brought into a right

relationship with God. Our sin had separated us from God. It was impossible for us to reach up to God, so He reached down to us by sending Jesus. It is only through the sacrifice of Christ that our sin is removed.

Jesus alone lived a perfect, sinless life (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus alone was worthy to die on the cross as the unblemished lamb of God and take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus alone has died in our place as the sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2; Hebrews 10:26). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus alone has conquered sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Timothy 1:10; Isaiah 25:8; Hebrews 2:14). Jesus alone is the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us, the exact Representation of God the Father.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). There is none like Jesus.

In John 14:6 Jesus says, ***"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me."*** Acts 4:12 says, ***"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."***

Some will reject these truths of scripture. They will argue that since many religions include Jesus they should be accepted. We must be careful with this way of thinking. Some religions believe Christ is not God, that He was just a man who was a prophet or a popular teacher. Some believe that He did not die on the cross or that he was not raised from the dead. Others see him as a symbol of what humans can be, but not a true historical person. Some see him as one who gradually became good enough to become a god. One religion actually believes that he was the brother of Satan. And the list goes on, but these changes deny His divinity, His sinlessness, and His teachings in such a way that it disqualifies Him from being our Savior and Redeemer.

Jesus Christ, as revealed in scripture, is mankind's only way to be reconciled to God.

Now, back to today's question. Since Jesus is the only way to salvation, "What happens to good people who never hear about Jesus?"

### **3. Good people don't exist**

We first must examine the phrase "good people". What is meant by that term, good? I don't think we are meaning a perfect person, because we would all agree that no one is perfect.

So, then what are we meaning by good? Better than the murderer? Better than the thief? Better than the adulterer? But did Jesus not say, ***"everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart"*** (Matthew 5:28)? Did Jesus not say that ***"anyone who murders will be subject to judgment"***, but also that ***"anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will also be subject to judgment"***? Have we not each at sometime coveted, lied, gossiped, bragged, been guilty of selfishness, and disobeyed God?

The Bible clearly states that *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

That *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one”* (Romans 3:10-12).

We all were dead in our sin, slaves to sin, enemies of God, rebellious, foreigners, strangers. This is the starting place of every person. We were sinful not only in our deeds, but also in our nature that has been passed down from Adam and Eve to all mankind. Our guilt makes it impossible to draw near to the holiness of God.

Isaiah 59:2 tells how, *“your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”*

All of us have sinned. No one is good. Our sin had separated all of us from God. Whether one be born into a Christian family or a Muslim family. Whether one be rich or poor. Whether one be educated or uneducated, all have sinned and the wages of sin is death . . . but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

With this in mind, we once again return to the question at hand with one slight change: “What happens to ~~good~~ people who never hear about Jesus?”

#### 4. General Revelation

At this point it is helpful to visit the concept known as General Revelation.

Scripture tells us of how God has made Himself known to all man by what has been created. Through nature God has given us proof that there is a God. This is called General Revelation.

Romans 1:18-26 puts it in these words:

*<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

*<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

From these verses we see that God has made Himself available to all mankind. *“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse.”*

We get a glimpse of the greatness of God in the order of nature. In the power of an earthquake, the beauty of a sunset, the vastness of the universe, the complexity of the human body. The glimpses of God are limitless as we look at His creation. His invisible attributes are there for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Mankind has no excuse. They cannot claim they have not heard, because God has shown Himself to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Others have refused to acknowledge the signs that God has given to lead us to Himself. They have not honored God or given Him thanks, and because of this their thinking has become futile and their hearts have been darkened. In their rejection of God they claim to be wise, when in reality they have become fools.

General Revelation, God showing Himself to all mankind through creation, leaves each person at a crossroads. They can either harden their hearts and not acknowledge the presence of God, or they can allow the General Revelation that God exists to quicken their hearts, stirring in them a desire to know more.

Those who choose to seek God are promised that God will reveal to them more of Himself.

Deuteronomy 4:29 proclaims, *“But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.”*

In Matthew 7:7-8 we read, *“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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”*

Jeremiah 29:13-14 states clearly, *“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD.”*

It is a promise. For those who respond to God’s General Revelation with a heart that longs to seek Him more, God will make sure that He is found by them.

It reminds me of playing Hide-and-Seek with my daughter when she was little. I would count and she would go hide. I would count out loud and then start looking for her. I would intentionally act like I could not find her. After a while she would start making sounds to “help me” find her. That is God’s promise. For those who seek Him with all of their hearts He promises to be found by them. That is the challenge that we can even give to non-believers who are seeking God. With full confidence encourage them just to seek the truth of God for themselves. Our confidence is that if they are truly seeking, God will make sure they find Him.

This is one of the reasons that Jesus came. It is in Christ that we see what the Father is like. We are no longer limited by the General Revelation of God that we find in the creation. In Jesus we see how the

character of God relates to man as He works in our world. We see the love of God, the wisdom of God, the kindness of God, the patience of God, the mercy of God, the justice of God, the compassion of God in action through the person of Jesus Christ.

In John 14 we read this conversation. Philip said to Jesus, *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."* Jesus said to him, *" . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is *"the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature."* Talking about Jesus, John 1:1,14,18 say, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . No one has ever seen God; the only God (Jesus), who is at the Father's side, he (Jesus) has made him (the Father) known."* As Paul writes in Colossians 1:15, *"He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God."*

God reveals Himself in generalities through creation. To those who respond by seeking Him more, He then shows Himself fully to them in the specifics through the person of Jesus Christ.

We see examples of this in scripture. In Acts 10, we read of Cornelius who was a centurion. It says that he was, *"a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God."* At this point in the story Cornelius feared God but knew nothing of the gospel. As Cornelius sought God, God came to Cornelius in a vision that resulted in the apostle Peter coming to Cornelius' house, preaching, and everyone in the household putting their faith in Jesus Christ.

Another example is in the life of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. The Ethiopian Eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship and now was returning home by chariot to his country. The Eunuch was seeking God, reading the scroll of Isaiah. God responded by bringing Philip to the exact place and time so that he would cross paths with the Eunuch. Philip was invited to join the Eunuch in the chariot, and Philip explained the passages of Isaiah that confirmed Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. The Eunuch then put his faith in Jesus and was baptized.

Again we see God's Special Revelation in the story of Lydia, in Philippi, who had gone down by the river to a place of prayer. As she and others were seeking God, Paul and his companions met them. It says that Lydia was a worshiper of God. Then as Paul and the others shared the gospel, *"the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul."* And she was baptized. She had a heart that sought after God, and in response God made sure He was found by her through Jesus.

We hear testimonies of this same principle in our world today. In John 6:44, Jesus tells how no one can come to Jesus unless God the Father draws him. God uses various methods to draw people to Jesus and to reveal Jesus to them. Some have friends or family members who God used to tell them about Jesus. Others were impacted by Christians who ministered to them in the midst of sickness or tragedy. Others had access to books or online testimonies that they watched and heard about Jesus. Some who have no Christian influence in their lives and in their city were drawn to Jesus through a dream or a vision.

Earlier this year, we had a young man from Iran baptized in our church. He told the story that even as a young man he had a heart that sought after God, even though he knew nothing about Jesus. He told

how on a school trip, through an airport in Turkey, an unknown woman came up to him and gave him a Bible. He returned home and began to read it, and this was the beginning of the seeds that were planted in his life that resulted in salvation years later.

For those who have a heart for God, He will make sure that as they seek Him, that He will be found by them.

In light of all of these scriptures that we have looked at today, let's now return to the original question: "What happens to good people who never hear about Jesus?"

- We now see that no one is good. We all have sinned, are separated from God and deserve condemnation.
- We now understand that through creation God has made a basic knowledge of His existence and His characteristics known to all mankind.
- In response to this General Revelation, some reject it leading to futility of thinking and hardness of hearts.
- Others respond to this General Revelation of God by seeking to know more of God.
- In response to those who seek God with all of their hearts, God makes Himself known by somehow revealing the person of Jesus Christ to them.
- Those who hear and put their faith in Jesus Christ are reconciled to God. Those who refuse to seek God and, instead, reject his revelation are separated from God and will spend eternity separated from God in hell.
- In light of all of this we are indebted that a holy God would reveal Himself to sinful mankind and send His Son, Jesus Christ, so that we can be saved.

## 5. Conclusion

In closing may we each consider the truths that have been discussed today.

For those who are not yet followers of Jesus Christ, will you seek God with your whole heart, and commit to believe in Him if He shows Himself to be true?

For those of you who are followers of Christ, may this reminder of God's grace rekindle in us a gratitude for the mercy of God that we have received. In return, may we be tools in God's hand as He seeks to make Himself known to the people in our world.

As written in Romans 10:13-16, *"For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are*

*they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"*

Seek and you will find.

**Discussion questions:**

- 1) What from this sermon did you find interesting?
- 2) What did you think about the discussion of “good people”?
- 3) How would you explain General Revelation in your own words?
- 4) What is the purpose of Special Revelation?
- 5) If you are a Christian, how did you hear about Jesus?
- 6) What do you need to remember from this sermon?
- 7) What do you think God wants you to do in response to this sermon?
- 8) How can we help you and pray for you in regards to that?