

ROMANS 2:1-11

WHAT OF THOSE WHO NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL?

“You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.”¹

It never ceases to amaze me that unbelievers in our own nation are more concerned for the heathen in distant lands than are the professed people of God. Among God’s holy people, the concern must not be critical, or we would invest more of our funds and our energies to advance missionary outreach, we would encourage our youth to prepare to carry the Gospel to benighted regions of our world and we would evangelise our neighbours more aggressively. For unbelievers, concern for the pagans is evidently important because they so frequently ask Christian leaders, “What about those who never heard the Gospel? Surely, God won’t condemn someone just because he has never heard the Gospel?”

Though my tone is sarcastic, this is nevertheless a legitimate question. In discovering the answer, we will learn that we are not absolved of responsibility to fulfil the Great Commission. You do remember the Great Commission—Jesus’ last word to His followers as He prepared to ascend into the heavens? You surely haven’t forgotten that Jesus commanded believers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

It has been said that evangelicals are *doctrinal* exclusivists, but *functional* universalists. I fear this is true of far too many of us who claim to be evangelical in our faith and practise. We say we believe in hell, but our failure to evangelise is just the sort of behavior one would expect from those who believe that all will work out well for non-believers. Lacking a sense of urgency to witness, we show ourselves skeptical of God’s righteous Judgement. You see, it makes little difference whether we fully support missionary endeavours if we fail to seek the lost at home.

Nevertheless, we must still consider the question, “What of those who have never heard the Gospel?” Is God concerned for Iranian Mullahs or for Somali Muslims? For the Laotian Buddhist? For the Chinese Communist Party member? For the Taiwanese Confucian? For the Haitian following Voudon? For the English Druid? What of these people?

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

SINS OF THE SAINTS — “You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” [ROMANS 2:1-5].

No excuse! That is harsh! We have no right to complain about the lack of missionaries if we are not evangelising here at home. One of the churches I restarted soon after I had arrived in Canada boasted that the congregation was supported almost one hundred missionaries. Technically, that was a true statement—the church sent five dollars, or in a few exceptional instances, ten dollars, to seventy or so missionaries every month. The church was dying when they asked me to come help them. They had two hundred fifty-five members, and attendance was fifty-five each week—no more, no less. The bulk of the membership had no connection with the congregation, having moved out of the area long ago or now being homebound. Still, the church bragged of their “strong” missionary programme.

The missionary budget drained congregational finances, ensuring that they could do little to advance the cause of Christ in their own community. The church had witnessed no baptisms in many years; there had been no conversions to the Faith in such a long time that no one could remember when such had happened last. The reputation of the congregation in the community was in tatters. The primary reason for this dreadful condition was because those attending did not invite anyone to share the services. Worse still, the people refused to speak to neighbours concerning their relationship to the Master. They spoke ill of other Christians, even Christians who shared the same doctrinal position supposedly held by the congregation.

Many of the older members were visibly angered when people from the community began to attend services. It seemed to me that the congregation willingly impoverish itself to send missionaries to Africa and Asia, but they were angry if a black, brown or yellow person came into the building. The first need of that congregation was to relearn basic Christianity. My diagnosis was that the saints needed to again read the Word—not reading as some slavish duty that had to be done because of some silly New Year’s Resolution; the members needed to again read the Word in order to hear the voice of the Risen Saviour guiding them from behind, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” They also needed to pray—really and truly pray. They did not need to say prayers—they needed to pray, investing time in the presence of the Son of God.

Yet, they exalted themselves in their own eyes, boasting of how much better they were than brother and sister Christians who belonged to some other communion, or who “did church” differently from the way in which they “did church” or who differed in some doctrinal position. Assuredly, they believed themselves to be superior morally and ethically to the heathen in every respect. After all, they did send money to people engaged in missionary work. If ever apostolic condemnation of arrogance was warranted, it was the members of that particular congregation. And I was now their pastor!

Because I pointed out the cautionary statements arising from the teachings of the Word, I quickly became *persona non-grata* in the eyes of these benighted Christians. It wasn’t just that they were living in opposition to the teaching of the Word, they didn’t want anyone to expose their sin. In fact, they were convinced that their hostility and arrogance wasn’t sinful.

The great tragedy of this particular congregation is that they are not exceptional. It seems that this is not only a present sin that has become acceptable among the churches, but it is an ancient sin that has infected the saints since earliest days. Look at the context of the text for our message today. Paul has just exposed the rampant sin tolerated within society at large. Paul's exposure of that sinful society, sounding much like contemporary society, begins in the previous chapter. Join me in reading his assessment so that no one imagines I am somehow looking at contemporary society in a selective manner.

The Apostle begins by stating what should be obvious to all Christians—God hates sin. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. 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. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

“Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 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.

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” [ROMANS 1:18-32].

Paul wrote this Letter to Roman Christians while engaged in church planting in Corinth. The society Paul described was Empire wide. That ancient society was defined by a people that were confident they were superior to the Barbarians because they were militarily strong. Whatever ancient morality had once marked that society was now long forgotten. They did not acknowledge God as Creator; therefore, He was not worthy of honour and glory. The reason for this was that they had exalted mankind to the position of highest honour. Thus, they could not recognise that God had given them over to the consequences of their own choice—their thinking was futile and they were shrouded in spiritual darkness. They believed that they had attained the pinnacle of intelligence and wisdom, but their actions revealed that they had become fools.

Like unthinking beasts, God surrendered them to what they imagined to be evidence of superior wisdom—tolerating that which should have been intolerable. To demonstrate their cultural superiority, they even invented a new morality that not only tolerated, but exalted, homoeroticism. Homoeroticism had become so prevalent and generally acceptable that even women embraced the sexual distortion, transforming her created purpose as the complement to man into a futile search for fulfilment that embraced passions that were both novel and base.

What should be shocking is that having thrown off restraint imposed by the created order, following in the wake was every imaginable expression of a debased mind. The list was shocking when Paul drafted it; and it should be shocking to people reading that dark list to this day. The worst part of this despicable listing of depravity is that not only were these sinful attitudes and characteristics tolerated, but society in general sought approval of the new morality. It is as though the Apostle is saying that man had sunk so low that he could not sink any lower.

As an aside, the assessment provided by the Apostle is applicable in full to contemporary society. Thus, we no longer know whether an individual is a male or a female. Even if an individual declares himself/herself/itself one sex today, he/she/it may be another tomorrow. What started as a movement to eliminate all barriers has created new barriers to all human interaction. Not content with confusing people as to what sex a person might be, modern social justice warriors are intent on teaching children from kindergarten onward about what they might be so as to ensure that all children are confused from as early an age possible!

At this point, many listening are no doubt nodding their heads sagely, just as those hearing the words of the Apostle read in that early congregation were in agreement to this point. Suddenly, Paul says, “Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed” [ROMANS 2:1-5].

He has turned the tables to expose the sin of the saints. We are ready to side with the Apostle against the immoral because we are offended when society embraces the gross sins Paul has listed! However, the Apostle is saying that the moralist is guilty before God. Of what is he guilty? Paul was writing of Jews; but it quickly becomes obvious that he includes Gentiles who aver commitment to the Risen Son of God. Our tendency is to judge others, not because their sins are so offensive, but because in judging we feel ourselves superior in our own situation. When we act in this manner, we cease to advance the cause of Christ the Lord and begin to exalt our own actions. Let me put that into language that should connect with modern Christians. When we judge another—however reprehensible the actions of that individual—we are exalting ourselves to the place of God. Thus, we are guilty of idolatry—the idolatry of elevating our own judgement as equivalent to or even superior to the judgement of Almighty God.

However, the Apostle is exposing an ugly attitude that leads us into the very sins we condemn. Paul is exposing pride. “We’re not like them; we’re better than that!” Are we? Paul is exposing contempt for God’s kindness. The attitude too often displayed, if not actually spoken, is “God will forgive us.” This attitude is nothing short of presuming against God’s grace. Christians must be warned against presuming “on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience” that God demonstrates toward all mankind. Do we not grow cavalier concerning God’s view of our sin when we exalt ourselves?

We harbour our respectable sins, imagining that they are nothing like the sin displayed by contemporary society. Thus, we accept ungodliness, anxiety, discontent, ingratitude, pride, selfishness, lack of self-control, anger, envy, gossip and impatience; we forget that there are no respectable sins. All sin is abhorrent to Holy God. We must allow ourselves to see sin as God sees sin. For God, all sin is “sinful beyond measure” [see ROMANS 7:13].

ROMANS 2:1-11
WHAT OF THOSE WHO NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL?

SENTENCE OF THE SAVIOUR — “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek” [**ROMANS 2:6-10**].

With this background, we must now turn again in order to consider the question before us, “What of those who never heard the Gospel?” Those who have heard the Gospel, including the vast majority of those living in western society, are without excuse. Overwhelmingly, citizens living in Canada know what God expects; nevertheless, they have made the conscious decision to reject God as Creator.

Bibles are available in multiple translations so that anyone can read them and understand what is being said. Audio Bibles are available to those unable to read. On my computer, I have Bibles in Danish, Dutch, French, German, Norse, Russian, and Coptic and Syriac Bibles also. Copies of various translations on my computer include over 170 Bibles or Bible portions in Greek, over 155 Bibles or Bible portions in English, over 107 Bibles or Bible portions in Hebrew and eighteen Bibles or Bible portions in Latin. As is true for many listening to this message, my phone has multiple copies of the Bible available for reading. The same is true for my Kindle reader. Despite the efforts of multiple individuals incensed at the possibility that someone might read a Bible, Gideon Bibles are still found in motel/hotel rooms, the waiting rooms of physicians and surgeons and in various other public places. It would be a most unusual individual who never had opportunity to own a Bible if they have lived in Canada more than a year.

If that were not enough to ensure that people have access to the Word of God, there are churches in almost every community throughout our nation. The messages preached in many churches are available on the Internet, available in audio through both the Internet and on radio and available on television. It requires determination to avoid being confronted by the preaching of the Word in our world today. The upstart of this is that it is almost impossible for anyone living in our nation to claim that they don’t know the will of God in this day.

If, somehow, all this were insufficient to ensure that people can know God, Paul addressed this very issue when he wrote, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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” [**ROMANS 1:18-20**]. The excuse that people can’t find God in our western world is tantamount to the saying that a thief cannot find a policeman—they refuse to look.

We’re diligently working our way toward those distant, darkened locations where no light of the Faith has penetrated. Such places are perhaps less common than you might imagine. For years, the various denominations have sent missionaries carrying the message of life throughout the world. The Pauline Epistles, the Letters of Peter and John’s missives are all written to people outside of the districts first identified with the movement known as “The Way.” The Apostles were writing to individuals who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, each carrying the message of grace and speaking of God’s salvation in Christ the Lord. By the end of the Apostolic Era, the message of life had been dispersed throughout the Mediterranean region, penetrating into most of Europe, the Indian subcontinent and as far as China.

We forget that it was the desire to deliver the message of life that drove the explorers to the New World and even led to penetration of the Asian continent with the Gospel in centuries past. Missionaries accompanied the earliest explorers. Perhaps someone would argue, “But the Gospel is not preached today in Muslim lands, or in Communist nations!” The Faith of Christ the Lord is growing rapidly throughout China. Though the Communist masters attempt to stamp out the Faith, the life of Christ the Lord continues to spread. Though the ancient church buildings are being destroyed and the believers persecuted mercilessly in those areas of Syria and Iraq that are under the control of the Islamic State, and though the Iranian regime and the Saudi kingdom attempt to stifle the Faith of the Lord Jesus, the message penetrates through radio and television; today, multitudes are coming to faith in the Son of God.

For all this, there still remain isolated areas where no radios exist. There are yet areas where no Gospel has been preached. There still are people in our world who can say in honesty, “I have not heard that Name, Jesus.” What of these individuals? Does God care for them? Will He really condemn them just because they have never heard of His Son? Is that possible?

I need you to think with me. There are two great approaches to the Faith as held by evangelicals. Some hold to what is identified as an Arminian view of the Faith. Others hold to what they identify as the Doctrines of Grace. In broad strokes, without attempting either to begin or to settle the debate that has raged since before the Reformation, as these approaches to theology apply to missionary endeavour there must be differences. Those holding to an Arminian view would argue that God’s prevenient grace puts all people in the position of being able to respond to the Gospel. The response of the individual is crucial in their view. In this theology, if no missionary goes to those who are lost, they cannot be saved. They cannot hear of Jesus nor can they respond until someone goes.

Opposed to that view is what is generally recognised as the Calvinistic view. While those holding to the Doctrines of Grace will agree that a response to the message of life is necessary, these individuals will insist that the ultimate cause of salvation lies in God’s election. It is God’s specific choice of certain persons for salvation that is essential in this view. Those holding to this view can argue that God will sovereignly ensure that every individual whom He has chosen will also be exposed to the message of life one way or another. In a more theological tone, we can say that *having determined the end, God will also enact the means*.

This becomes apparent from the verses that follow our text today. “All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” [ROMANS 2:12-16].

Remember, Paul is focused on those holding to the Jewish Faith, though ultimately he is focused on Christians. Thus, he challenges those who would argue that one must keep the Law in order to please God, pointing that the knowing what is written in the Law is of no great value if the individual fails to keep the Law. So, the Apostle asks, “While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples” [ROMANS 2:21b, 22]? This is significant in light of Jesus’ teaching that anger is as murder and lasciviousness is as adultery [see MATTHEW 5:21-30]. It is not knowing what is written, but doing what is right that impresses the Lord our God.

Paul continues, observing for our benefit, “Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” [ROMANS 2:17-29].

Rite and ritual, cant and creed, are of no value in making one pure before the Living God. However, God calls and His call is effective to those whom He calls. We imagine that people can be saved only in an identical fashion to the manner in which we imagine we came to faith. We focus on the experience rather than the faith of the individual. I pastored a church in which a man presented himself as a great servant of God. He boasted on a continual basis of the people he led to faith. Unfortunately, none of those he “led to faith” ever came into the Faith.

I asked him one day how he was leading all these people to faith. “Why, they pray the sinner’s prayer,” he stammered. He believed that reciting a prayer made one a Christian; if he could dupe people into reciting that particular prayer, they would be saved. His efforts differed little from Muslims efforts to make new Muslims—say the magic words and you’re in. He was merely inoculating people against the Faith by giving false security by assuring them that they had recited the appropriate prayer. Ergo, they must be saved! However, when the Philippian jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” the answer was “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” [see ACTS 16:30, 31]. The thing about believing is that it results in transformation!

It is worth repeating the evidence for this assertion. Writing in the Ephesian Letter, Paul speaks of what it means to be saved. He states, “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We are certain that one is forgiven all sin and brought into a right standing with the Lord our God because of faith in the Risen Son of God. However, the one who believes will be changed by the very God in whom he has believed. This is the reason that the Apostle continues by saying, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:8-10]. Believing in the Son of God saves an individual; and salvation transforms the sinner into a saint. Works do not save; but one who is saved will work.

This brings us back to the matter of those trapped in Muslim lands where coming to faith in the Son of God is detrimental to continued life. We can now return to those Communist lands where coming to faith in the Risen Saviour may well cost one her livelihood or even her life. Because God does the calling, and because He saves, He will ensure that the means for that one whom He calls to hear and believe.

Paul looks at the transformation that is evident in redeemed individuals. He focuses on an individual who looks upward to God, though he doesn’t know the Name of God or what God has provided, and seeks mercy. Look again at what is written near the end of this second chapter of Romans. “If a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” [ROMANS 2:26-29].

Think with me of how one becomes a Christian. In order to make this point, I ask you to recall what Paul wrote concerning Abraham's salvation. "What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" [**ROMANS 4:1-5**].

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Paul is citing **GENESIS 15:6** when he writes these words. The Hebrew behind that could be translated, "He said 'Amen' to the LORD, and the LORD counted his agreement with what was promised as righteousness." Understand, Abraham agreed with the LORD; and his agreement was counted as righteousness. Now, in light of Scripture, it is faith in God that results in righteousness. The faith is counted as righteousness. The work does not bring righteousness.

Now, imagine a woman living in Iran. She knows there is a Creator because she is aware of the creation. She knows that the Creator must be good because He His Creation is clearly good. She knows that the Creator is powerful, because He created all things. She reasons that this One must, of necessity, be God. Though she does not know God, she longs to know Him. She reasons that it is impossible for her to compel God to accept her. Because He is Creator, because He possesses all power, she must accept Him and cast herself on His mercy. Therefore, she prays to a God she does not know, asking Him to show her mercy and to accept her.

Will God accept such a person? How was Abraham saved? He called on the unseen God, seeking mercy and forgiveness. And when God revealed Himself to Abraham, Abraham said, "Yes, LORD," and his faith was counted as righteousness. Did Abraham know the name of God's Son? Obviously, he could not know that the Son of God would be called "Jesus." Did Abraham know the details of the sacrifice that would be presented for sinful people? There was no way that he could know what God would do. Abraham could only believe God; and his faith was counted as righteousness.

Abraham was saved by looking to God for mercy, trusting that God would make a way for him to be forgiven. The woman in Iran calling on the unseen God cries out, trusting that God will make a way for her to be forgiven. The difference between that woman and modern Canadians is that she does not know that the Name of the Saviour God has provided is "Jesus," and we know that the Name of God's Redeemer is "Jesus." She looks up trusting that God will provide a Saviour; we look up knowing that God has provided a Saviour.

GOD'S IMPARTIALITY — "God shows no partiality" [**ROMANS 2:11**]. In the West, we often appear to have fallen into grave error. It is as if we believe God favours us because of the accident of birth. Such attitudes reveal that we know little of the Living God. Because God is god, it is necessary that we recognise that we can know nothing of Him except through revelation. If God chooses not to reveal Himself to us, it will be impossible to know Him. However, God has revealed Himself to mankind. We know Him through the revelation of the Word. Moreover, when God sent His Son, we received understanding.

Jesus revealed the Father to mankind. On one occasion, Jesus taught His disciples, saying, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."

His avowal compelled Thomas to respond, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

At this plea, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’”

Thomas had asked how the disciples could recognise “the Way,” and Jesus had answered that He was the sole way in which an individual could come to the Father. This assertion by the Master caused Philip to exclaim, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

Listen to Jesus’ response; it is critical that we get this right. “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves’” [JOHN 14:1-11].

Seize on this truth: Jesus Christ is God. Anyone who knows Christ Jesus knows God. Jesus, because He was lifted up, now draws all people to Himself. This was prophesied when Jesus said, “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself” [JOHN 12:32]. In his Gospel account, John explains, “[Jesus] said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die” [JOHN 12:33]. We must not imagine that because we are wealthy in comparison to the most of mankind that God loves us more than others. We must not imagine that because we were born in a nation which has immediate access to the written Word of God and immediate access to multiplied preachers that God loves us more than others.

When we are allowed to peer into Heaven as John draws aside the veil that separates time from eternity, we see a stunning scene that must shortly be played out before all believers. John tells us of the people of God, gathered to Christ at His return when the faithful are raptured out of the earth. John sees them in Heaven as the Son of God receives the title deed to all creation. God made the universe; and God shall claim all creation for His Son. As the Lamb of God receives the scroll on which are written the words giving Him title to all that is, John writes of the redeemed of God, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Then John writes, “They sang a new song, saying,

‘Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.’”

[REVELATION 5:9-10]

Even now, God is gathering from every tribe and language and people and nation those who are being made into a kingdom and priests to God. God is choosing people from all mankind to serve Him eternally. None of us can say that we are special, that we are privileged, that we have somehow merited the grace we receive. God has shown us mercy. No one among us can boast that we deserve what we have received. It is all of grace.

Later, John wrote of those who will be redeemed out of the Great Tribulation. He wrote, “I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, *from all tribes and peoples and languages*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen’”

[REVELATION 7:9-12].

We are not left to guess who these are whom John saw, for he continues writing, “Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

‘Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

[REVELATION 7:13-17]

Those who will be redeemed out of the Great Tribulation will represent every nation, all tribes and peoples and languages. They shall be redeemed; and their redemption is all of grace.

Perhaps you have been so foolish as to ask, “What of those who have never heard?” You now know that the issue for you is whether *you* have believed on Christ the Lord. You have heard the declaration that He died because of your sin and that He conquered death, rising from the dead to present you faultless before the Father’s throne. What have you done with this knowledge? Have you received the grace of God that is offered? Or do you still delay to believe. The message we bring calls you to be saved. This is what is necessary if you will be set free. If you openly agree with God, “Jesus is Master,” believing with all your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free—free of guilt, free of condemnation, free to be a child of God with the full inheritance He has promised to His own dear children. One who will be redeemed openly agrees and is set free, and as that one believes with her heart she is made right with the Father. The promise of God is that “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [see ROMANS 10:9-13]. Our invitation is for each one who listens to be saved. Amen.