

Jeff May - What About the Eternal Destiny of People Who Have Never Heard About Jesus?

Well, I appreciate very much the opportunity to be here, and my apologies for just not noticing the text. I just assumed seven o'clock and didn't read my text message very well and found out it was 6:30. So, this will turn out to be a little bit more of a speed course, but I think we'll be alright. We are addressing the question tonight, are people who have never heard the gospel of Christ lost? Well, and with any other question that involves eternity, where we solve that is by looking at what the Bible has to say. We begin with the Bible, we end with the Bible, everything in between. As we answer the question, what about those who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ?

I want to give us four major points tonight, and the first one is simply this, everyone of accountable age is guilty of sin against God. I think we know what we mean by an accountable age. Deuteronomy. One talks about your children, who today have no knowledge of good and evil. Their conscience has not kicked in. And while that age may vary from person to person, I think we all understand that there comes a time when a person becomes old enough to realize that I have sinned against the God of heaven. The Bible teaches that children are not born in sin. Jesus said that unless you become his little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, Jesus encourages us to be like little children. But what we learn when we come to Romans chapter three is that every person of accountable age has sinned against God. In Romans the third chapter in verse 23 the text simply says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So, I want us to understand this tonight. They are lost not because they haven't heard the gospel. They're lost because they are in sin. We need to understand the problem is not the gospel. The problem is sin. The gospel is the solution. And the book of Romans really nails that down in a lot of ways. When I think about the book of Romans, someone has mentioned that you might think of the book of Romans as though you have entered a courtroom. You have entered a courtroom, and the whole world is on trial. The charge is that whole world has sinned against God. Paul, in this book, becomes the prosecuting attorney through the Holy Spirit, and he's laying down his case against all people, both Jews and Gentiles. And Jesus is spoken of as being the great judge of everyone. And at last, what happens is in chapter one, Paul builds his case against, first of all, the Gentiles. If you look at chapter one of Romans, Romans one beginning in verse 28 speaking of Gentiles, it says, "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness and sexual immorality and wickedness and covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil mindedness, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving and unmerciful. Who knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are worthy of death and not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them." He has laid down his case solid against the Gentile world. You have sinned against God.

Secondly, we see that in chapter two you can kind of picture a Jew now beginning to poke out his chest and say, Yeah, tell him, Paul. But in chapter two, he comes strong against the Jews, and he says to them in verse five, "in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and the revelation of the judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds." And so, chapter one, Gentiles have sinned against God. Chapter Two, Jews have sinned against God. And so, the verdict comes in chapter three. When you come down to chapter three and verse 19, it simply says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped." It's almost like the judge has heard the verdict. The verdict has come in, and the judge says, Is there anything that you would like to say, and you have nothing to say. "Every mouth is stopped, and the whole world may become guilty before God." Do we hear it? The whole world becomes guilty before God. All have sinned against God. Another way to think about that is this, the diagnosis here is that you've got a terrible illness, and that illness is sin. That's the problem. The diagnosis is sin. The remedy is the gospel. Again, that's why I say the gospel is not the problem, the gospel is the solution. We sometimes speak of this as though the gospel is the problem. They haven't heard the gospel. No, the gospel is not the problem. Sin is the problem. And the next thing that we see is that the response to handle this problem is to respond to the gospel.

The second point I think we can make pretty quickly for the sake of time, because you are familiar with all of these passages, and that is this major plank: no one is saved apart from faith in Jesus and obedience to the gospel. Remember what Jesus said in John 14 and verse six? Jesus said, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No man." Now, it's kind of like, what part of that do we not understand? "No man comes to the Father, but by Me." No man goes to the Father, except through Jesus Christ. In Acts four and verse 12, we're told that there is not salvation in any other name. There's no other name that's been given under heaven whereby we may be saved. And that is the name of Jesus Christ. And I remember when I was a little boy in Second Thessalonians, chapter one and verse eight, hearing preachers emphasize that Jesus is coming in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Nobody comes to the Father, but by me, there's no other way to be saved except through Jesus and everybody who doesn't obey the gospel is lost.

And so those are the planks that we have here in this first section. Now this next one is one that I feel like we need to hammer down on in a big way. Everybody has received a knowledge of God. We like to say there are some people who have never heard. It may be that there's people who have not yet heard the gospel, but the Bible denies that there is anybody on the face of the earth who has not heard a message from God. Everybody has heard a message from God. And we sometimes talk about this like there's just this place, somewhere where people haven't heard. And that may still be so in our modern world, but my preacher friends are telling me that most everywhere they go, even in the most remote places, they get there, and they find a translation of the scriptures. I don't know how many places are left on the face of the earth where people have no access to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but every man has received a message from God. Every man has received a knowledge of God, and that point is hammered down in Romans chapter one, if you would turn there. In Romans, chapter one, beginning in verse 18, the apostle Paul says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," and then catch this, "who suppress the truth in their

unrighteousness." They know the truth. They just want to push it down. They want to suppress it, hold it back. I don't want this in my life. Then he says in verse 19, "that what may be known of God is manifest in them. For God has shown it to them. For since the," here it is, "For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." That verse says that you can look at the created world, and you can understand that somebody more powerful than man made everything that there is. You can see eternal power. You can see design, creativity, all of these things you can see by looking at the created world. And don't miss this, God says that you are without excuse if you do not see it.

Now, God said that, and not me. God is saying there is ample evidence that any man can see if he wants to see it that there is a God. In Psalm 19, Paul makes that, or excuse me, the Psalmist makes that same argument in Psalm 19. You're familiar with it. It says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day, utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard, their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world." What God is saying is that there is a voice that goes out across the entire world. There is not a place that you can live that you don't understand what it's saying. This is a message that every man, no matter what language he speaks, can understand. He looks into the heavens, and he should be able to see the handiwork of God. That's why the Bible has said The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. So, I think we have to begin there. Let's not think that people haven't heard a message from God. Let's not think that God is not speaking to men all over the world through his created world. In Acts the 14th chapter, it talks about how even rain is a witness that there is a God. Verse 15, talking to pagans, Paul said to these that were bowing down and worshiping him and Barnabas, "men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you and preach to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things that are in them. Who in bygone generations, allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he did not leave himself without witness in that he did good, and he gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons. Filling our hearts with food and gladness." Rain is evidence of a God who cares for us and tries to take care of us and provides food for us. And all of this put together, is saying I have spoken. God is screaming to every man I am in your world. You're in Florence. My understanding is that Helen Keller wrote some letters to a preacher and indicated to him that she had been thinking about God a long time. Can't hear, can't speak, can't see, but even yet, is able to reason. She said I did not know his name; I did not know what to call him, but she had reasoned that there was a God.

And the next thing I'm stressing here is that even Gentiles had a knowledge of God, and they were accountable to that light. This is a major point. This would be talking about those who were not God's people spread out across the world, in various in various nations. But notice what Paul says in Romans, chapter two, beginning in verse 11. First of all, he says there's no partiality with God. "For as many as have sinned without law, will perish without law." Now here's what he means by that. The Gentiles didn't have a codified law. They didn't have a law written down like the Jews had, but Paul is indicating that they had a law. "As many as have sinned without law will perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law," that is in the law of Moses, "will be judged by the law. For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified." Now listen to verse 14, "For when Gentiles who do not have the law," that is, they don't have the law of Moses, "by nature, they do the

things contained in the law. And these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and between themselves, their thoughts accuse or else excuse." He's saying that the Gentile world has an understanding that some things are right, and some things are wrong. And they have an innate understanding that I have done wrong, and in other times, they can feel as though I have done right without having a codified law. Then in verse 16, he says, "In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." So, let me slow down. Gentiles knew that certain things were right and wrong. It may be trickle down knowledge because, you know, God did send prophets to Gentile nations. They knew certain things were right and wrong. They had a heart and a conscience that could work. You know, children. Children start very early. It seems sometimes, without any teaching, give me that back, that's not fair. Where did they get this concept of fair? Where did they get this concept of that's not right? It seems to kind of be built in. God has put eternity in our hearts. And even hardened criminals, even men who have done very, very bad things in prison, will kill a child molester in prison. Even they have a code. I might have done this. I might have robbed a bank. I might have, I might have shot somebody and killed them, but you don't mess with a child. They have a code. Where does that come from? God holds these Gentile nations responsible for what they know of God's will and how to live. Jonah was sent to Nineveh. If you read Isaiah 13 all the way through 23 it's just one nation after another that God is holding accountable. Even though they did not have the law of Moses, they still knew some things about God.

Now here's something I want you to understand, this knowledge that every man has available to him, God, speaking throughout the whole world, that there is a God that should lead to number two, and that is it leads to seeking God. In Hebrews 11 and verse three, we're taught, told about God creating the world, in Hebrews 11 and verse three. But then in Hebrews 11 and verse six, it says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God," number one, "must believe that He is." See, that's where it starts. I believe that he is. But then secondly, it says, "he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." I find it so interesting that somebody can look at the creation and say, I just know that there's a higher being. I just know there's a God. And it's kind of interesting. Step two is made pretty easy. You stumble across a book. What? Where does it start? "In the beginning, God". And you would go, Whoa, what if i What have I found here? And you began to look at it. It is a sin not to respond to the light that you have. It's a sin not to respond to the amount of light that you have. When you have a knowledge of God, that there is a God it's a sin not to pursue that. In Matthew 12 and verse 41 [editor's note: the correct passage is Matt 11:21] we learn that our privileges mean responsibility. In Matthew 12 and verse 41 Jesus said, "Woe to you, Chorazin, Woe to you, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago and sack sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sidon and Tyre in the day of judgment than for you." The point is Jonah showed up and we repented. You had Jesus. And what they're trying to say is that you are accountable to act on the light that you have. They had Jonah. You had Jesus. Every man is expected by God to respond. Let me say it this way, it is a sin to remain willfully ignorant. In Romans chapter one, when I was listing those things that Gentile nations did. One of the things that it said that they did was that they, were in verse 31, my version says in verse 31 undiscerning. Some translated stupid. They're undiscerning. They don't want to discern, they don't want to seek, they don't want to find out. It's a sin not to want to know about the true and the living God.

And this leads to the next thing that I firmly believe. I think the Bible shows us in a number of instances, everyone has received knowledge of God, and anyone who wants further knowledge of God will receive it. Now the key word here is anyone who wants it. Anyone who wants further knowledge of God will receive it. You have to want to know. And why wouldn't somebody say it's obvious. There's a god. It's speaking to me loudly. I want to know Him. Do you see how one thing is leading to another? I don't know if you can see this. I find it to be a neat PowerPoint. I didn't make it. I like what it does though. You ever drive at night? Sometimes I drive at night, and I might drive 100 miles. I can't see my way all the way, but I can see about 50 feet in front of me. And you know what happens if I follow that light in that 50 feet in front of me? I get 50 more feet in front of me, and I get 50 more feet in front of me. And if I keep following the light that is available to me, it will take me all the way. That's what I believe the Bible is showing, is that man has a responsibility to respond to the light that he has, and if he seeks light, he will be given more light. The problem is not with God. The problem is with us. In Romans chapter one, I want you to notice that the Gentiles did not want to know. Romans one, picking up in verse 21 it says, "although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were they thankful." They know but they don't want it, and they end up worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator, and they give their bodies over to sexual immorality, lesbianism, homosexuality, all of these things. And notice verse 28 says they did not like to retain God in their knowledge. What that means is they had God in their knowledge. They just kicked him out. And you know why people do that? Because a lot of people don't want to live for God. They want unrighteousness and so in unrighteousness, they push the truth down. It's like when you were a child and somebody, one of your little playmates, is trying to say something that you want them to stop saying, and you go, la, la, la, la, I can't hear you. And that's what people do to God, la, la, la, la, la, I can't hear you. I won't hear you. My ears are stopped up.

Do you follow me? Are you seeing the process here? God says himself that you are without excuse if you cannot see me and hear me through the created world. And that should lead to seeking God. And with seeking God, I believe, comes to finding God. Again, for the sake of time, I will simply say this you're familiar with it. Acts chapter eight. There's a man traveling along. He's reading from his manuscript or reading from his text. He's reading about somebody led to us as a lamb to the slaughter, but he doesn't know what he's reading. Guess what? God causes Philip to intersect with him. He's seeking, and God helps him to find. In Acts nine, there's no doubt in my mind that Saul wants to do right. He's seeking God, and wham, Jesus appears to him on the road to Damascus. Cornelius was a man who was devout, prayed to God always help people seeking God. And an angel appeared to him and said, Cornelius send for Simon, and he will tell you what you must do. I am not suggesting at all that we should expect these miraculous kind of happenings, but I am saying to you that in Scripture, what do we see? We see God getting the message to those who want it. That's key. To those who want it. In Acts 17, he comes to Mars Hill, and there at the Areopagus, he teaches them about the living God who made heaven and earth. And it's in him that we live and move and have our very being. And they obviously had already decided step one, that there's a God, because they had these statues to all these different gods. But what Paul indicates here is that you've got to reason properly. Look at what he says verse 29, "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or stone, or something shaped by art or man's devising." It's kind of like he's saying, Look at yourself. Do you really think you came from a rock? Do you really think you came from a stone? I mean, come on, living comes from living. And so, a person can reason improperly, but there Paul is on

the scene trying to help them to reason properly. And he goes on to say in verse 30, that "truly, these times of ignorance, God overlooked, but he can now commands all men everywhere to repent."

And it's not just in the Bible. I hear remarkable stories all the time. I heard one other day about a preacher, true story. He's on a train traveling to preach the gospel somewhere, and a conductor walks down the aisle, sees the Bible, picks it up and throws it out the window. A year or so later, he goes back to that same country, finds a man who had found that Bible and it had the preacher's name in it, and when the preacher came again, he recognized the preacher's name, and he showed him. Look what I found. And he obeyed the gospel. There's a lot of stories out there like that, where, incredibly, the Bible has found its way to people that are seeking. So, there are people out there who want to find God. There are people who have a desire to know Him. And what did Jesus tell us? Jesus said, Go. And I'm going to tell you this. And as far as I'm concerned, I think this is one of the strongest arguments of all. If people are okay because they've never heard the gospel, and the reason they're okay is because they haven't heard it, then what do I need to do? Stay home. Because I do them an injustice. They're okay until they haven't heard it, until they've heard it, but when I go tell them, now they've heard it, and now they're in trouble. No, the gospel is not the problem. The gospel is the solution. God said, Go. Why? Because there's men out there who have probably already seen me, and they're looking and they want to know, and he's going to help them to get to them. Jesus said, Go. How shall they hear without a preacher?

And so, we need to understand in all of this that we cannot excuse, really, anybody. I see it as a process. Step one, there's a God. Step two, I want to know him. I'm seeking Him. And seeking Him, He provides help for me to find him. In finding him, I hear the gospel and I obey the gospel. There's not a whole lot more that I was going to say about that, except to say this. Sometimes people will say, Well, what about all the sincere people? Even in our country, sincere people? Well, I believe there are sincere people, but sometimes sincerity gets tested, and when we hear the message, we can't just dismiss it. We can't just set it aside. Our responsibility is to look into it, study it, obey it. And so, I hope those few things help tonight, I said most everything that I wanted to say, and I hope that will be helpful to us as we think about this important subject.