

**Sermon Notes of
Elder Larry Helscher's Sermon on January 22, 2017**

"Fate of the Unevangelized"

[In today's sermon, "Fate of the Unevangelized ", Elder Larry Helscher shows the three major Christian viewpoints concerning the fate of the unevangelized: Restrictivism, Wider Hope and Universalism.]

Notes:

Introduction:

"Heaven" (Unknown Author):

*I was shocked, confused, bewildered
As I entered Heaven's door.
Not by the beauty of it all
Nor the lights or its décor.*

*But it was the folks in Heaven
Who made me sputter and gasp –
The thieves, the liars, the sinners,
The alcoholics, the trash.*

*There stood the kid from seventh grade
Who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbor
Who never said anything nice.*

*Herb, who I always thought
Was rotting away in Hell,
Was sitting pretty on cloud nine.
Looking incredibly well.*

*I nudged Jesus, "What's the deal?
I would love to hear your take.
How'd all these sinners get up here?
God must've made a mistake.*

*"And why's everyone so quiet,
So somber? Give me a clue."
"Hush, child," said He, "they're all in shock.
No one thought they'd be seeing you!"*

- While not theologically accurate, it's still gives us an introduction to the subject.

The unevangelized:

- What's going to happen to the billions of people for all eternity?

- This is a debate going on for a couple of thousand years.
- And we're not going to settle this issue today.
- However, since we have the Spirit of God, we should gain some greater understanding.
- Here is a letter to the editor of Proclamation! Magazine about this subject.

I found the issue sent me to be both comforting and terrifying. On one hand it releases me from legalism, and on the other it tells me that the eternal torture of hell fire awaits those that do not believe.

As if I could be happy knowing there are those suffering unimaginable pain while God's chosen experience the joys of heaven!

But I have asked God to reveal His true self to me, and not my belief of what His true self is.

John Sander's book, "No Other Name":

- About 10 years ago, the President of our denomination, Pastor General Dr. Joseph Tkach, Jr. gave a sermon on this subject which intrigued Larry Helscher.
- So he asked Dr. Tkach to send him some information about what's going to happen to the unevangelized.
- Larry received in the mail from Joe Tkach this book by John Sanders, "No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized."
- The unevangelized are people who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Sometimes they are called the "lost" or the "unsaved."
- This book – the basis of today's sermon – provides an outline of the three main views about the fate of the unevangelized.
- So why are we going through this?
- First, to learn what other Christians believe about this subject.
- And more importantly, this will help us to learn more about the nature and character of God.
- This is not a salvational issue for Christians that you must believe in the correct viewpoint about this subject.
- Dr. Brad Jersak in several of his books writes, "The Bible is richly polyphonic."
- This word means consisting of many voices or sounds.
- Certainly there are many verses in the Bible that can be interpreted various ways, literally or figuratively.
- John Sanders quotes two major Scriptures in his book that highlight the major problem concerning the unevangelized.

Acts 4:12, Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

1 Timothy 2:3, This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4) who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

- These two scriptures show the potential conflict.
- Jesus is the only way to be saved and many have not either in the past nor in this present life accepted Jesus.
- Yet God says He wants everyone to be saved.

The three main Christian views from John Sanders's book, "No Other Name":

1) Restrictivism – means being saved now in this life or never.

- It means that if you are not saved in this life, you can never be saved.
- John Calvin taught this.
- Most Baptists and evangelicals believe this.
- Even many Non-Christians believe this.
- This view fosters fear and exercises their control over people.
- This is from a mailer from the American Bible Society, who is seeking a donation.

Troops like this Iraq War veteran, know all too well that any day could be their last. We must share God's Word with them while we can. Your gift today will help American Bible Society place God's Word into the hands of thousands of troops, and the difference you help make will last for eternity!

- Larry with his wife, had the opportunity to visit the Billy Graham library in Charlotte, NC, when they were in Charlotte to attend a wedding.
- A lot of people have come to Christ through the preaching of Billy Graham.
- However, their belief on the unevangelized tends to be restrictive.
- These are the two most often quoted scriptures by the restrictive believers.

Romans 3:9, What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. 10) As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11) there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God" (Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3).

Mark 1:14, After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15) "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

- We need to note that these and other scriptures quoted don't say when people will have a chance to be saved.
- They're assuming a person needs to accept Jesus before death.

2) The Wider Hope – which is what our denomination GCI believes.

- GCI Statement of Beliefs (2001)

Eternal Judgment: At the end of the age God will gather all the living and the dead before the heavenly throne for judgment. The righteous will receive eternal glory and the wicked will be condemned to the Lake of Fire.

In Christ, the Lord makes gracious and just provisions for all even for those who at death who appeared to have not believed the gospel. (There are 9 scriptures that support this view.)

- GCI Statement of beliefs (2009)

The Judgment: God judges all humans through Jesus Christ as those who belong to God through him. Therefore, all humans are, in spite of themselves, loved, forgiven, and included in Jesus Christ, who is their Lord and Savior.

God's love will never cease or diminish even for those who, denying the reality of who they are in him. Refuse his love and consign themselves to hell; they will not enjoy the fruit of his salvation but rather will experience his love as wrath.

God disciplines those he loves so that they will return to him and live; he stands at the door and knocks, urging them to open the door to his everlasting love. God's judgment in Christ means the ultimate end of evil and the renewal of the earth and all creation.

- This statement pretty much sums up the concept of a "Wider Hope" where all will be given the opportunity for salvation.
- Here are two main scriptures that support this view point.

John 5:28, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29) and come out – those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

Acts 24:15, and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

- Dr. Tkach recently spoke here on the subject of judgment.
- He said that we are really going to judge ourselves either by ultimately accepting or rejecting Jesus.
- Brad Jersak's book, "A More Christlike God" talks about God's wrath which is God has given us free more agency – the freedom to commit sin and then reap its consequences.
- God doesn't throw down His wrath upon us because He hates us.
- We'll take a look at a passage in Revelation that talks about the "great white throne judgement."
- We need to remember that revelation is highly symbolic and not always chronological.

Rev. 20:11, Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13) The sea gave up the dead that were in it,

and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14) Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15) Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

- It's all very symbolic, especially the term "Lake of Fire."
- Dr. Jersak and other Biblical scholars feel that fire from God, in part, is talking about the trouble that came upon Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.
- Now we know that Satan is ultimately thrown into the Lake of Fire.
- And we also know that a physical fire won't hurt Satan who is a spirit being.
- The Bible talks about fire as both literal and figuratively.
- The Lake of Fire is figurative.
- Article from Biblical scholar Ralph Woodrow, "Unquenchable Fire":

We intend to show, from Scripture and history, that the "wrath to come" about which John warned, was fulfilled in the fiery destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in A.D. 70.

Repeatedly Josephus mentions efforts to "quench" the fire – even by Titus (Roman Emperor), especially when he sought to save the temple as a monument to Roman conquest – but all efforts were in vain. The judgment of God was carried out. No one was able to QUENCH that FIRE – it was unquenchable!

3) Universalism – everybody will be saved.

- Universalism is discounted by many Bible scholars.
- One of the major criticisms of this belief is then why bother with evangelism, if everyone will ultimately be saved.
- But Scripture tells us that God gave us the "Great Commission" to preach the gospel.
- The other major objection is that Universalists believe that all roads (even non-Christian ones) lead to salvation.
- Now the Bible says this isn't true because Jesus is the only way to salvation.
- So what are we going to do with these "all" scriptures.
- There are over 30 "all" scriptures – for example:

John 12:32, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Acts 3:21, Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore all things, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

- These scriptures really show that everyone will have an opportunity to be saved.
- Another book Dr. Brad Jersak has written is entitled, "Her Gates Will Never Be Shut."
- In this book, he writes about the scriptures that give hope that for the most part Universalism is true in that most humanity will eventually accept Jesus.

- Here are a few more Scriptures used by Universalists.

Romans 5:18, Consequently, just as one trespass (Adam) resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act (Jesus) resulted in justification and bring life for all people.

1 Timothy 2:3, This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4) who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5) For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6) who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

- Please note that it doesn't say that this event has to occur in this life time.
- We see God's true nature displayed in the parable of the lost sheep where Jesus goes after the one who strayed away (Luke 15:3-5).
- Recently the Moravian church in Czechoslovakia had a 100 year heavy evangelistic movement and yet they were Universalists. (So they broke the tradition.)
- Now let's look at Revelation again.

Revelation 21:22, I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23) The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25) On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26) The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

- The question is where did all those nations come from?
- It could mean those who didn't know Christ in their lifetime.

Revelation 22:1, Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2) down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3) No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

- The river is not a physical river but a metaphor.
- Jesus told us in the gospels that the river is the Holy Spirit flowing.
- Again the nations probably represent those who have not accepted Jesus in their lifetime.

Concluding comments:

- So, many Christians are at one end of the spectrum or the other – Restrictivism or Universalism.
- Our denomination is in the middle.
- It says in Matthew 19:26 that "With God, all things are possible."
- God can choose to offer salvation to anyone at any time.

- We need to ask this important question – Is God's love punitive, where it's going to get you and chastise you, or is it restorative, that will bring you to Him?
- And if we are in error, it's better to be in error in the direction of God's incredible grace.

Closing Prayer