



## What Happens to People Who Never Hear the Gospel?

### *The Story of Scripture – Part 33*

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Romans 15. It's good to be together around God's Word. And I want to welcome people online. I don't usually mention this, but I want to welcome those who may be listening to this later, because I pray that what we walk through in the Word in the next few minutes would have far-reaching effects in the years to come.

We are building today on last Sunday, on two levels. Let me recap for those of you who may not have been here. First, last Sunday, more people went out to the lobby to confess faith in Jesus through baptism. It hit me Friday night, when we were having late night prayer here, that since the last time we had late night prayer about a month ago, 450 people have been baptized as followers of Jesus.

We fasted and prayed and asked God to do what only He could do and He's doing it. Most of those people were not expecting to do that until they came that day. God spoke to them and they did what He was calling them to do—on the spot. I want to show you a video from last week of a brother who is 80 years old. I'll just let the video speak for itself.

**Video:** My name is David. I was baptized as a young man. I abandoned God and abandoned Jesus when I was a teenager. I spent 54 years as an atheist. So after my life turned out bad, I needed to turn it around. I've been coming to this church, hoping to get an inkling about why I made the decision I did. And through a class I took here I discovered that I never gave Christianity a chance. I never gave Jesus a chance. I never gave God a chance. I had searched for spiritual solutions, but found none. Coming back to the church and coming back to Jesus, I found out how much Jesus has been in my life all this time. Not only is Jesus restoring my body from cancer, but Jesus is restoring my soul.

**Minister:** Well, David, do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins, was buried and rose three days later from the grave?

**David:** I do.

**Minister:** David, do you commit to surrender your life to Christ through the ability and power of the Holy Spirit?

**David:** I do.

**Minister:** David, upon your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Buried in the likeness of His death, raised to walk in newness of life.

**David Platt:** That was not an easy thing, on many levels, for David to do. So he pretty much took away all of our excuses. God is calling more people today to put their trust in Him and be baptized. Today is the day for you to publicly confess faith in Jesus. I want to invite you to do that today.

At the same time, today is the day we've been looking forward to since last Sunday, as we begin asking God Who He might be setting apart among us to take the gospel where it has not yet gone. For those of you who may be visiting with us and may not be familiar with the term "gospel," it's a word that means good news. It describes the good news of how God loves us and has made a way for us to be forgiven of all our sin against Him and brought back into a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus.

Last week we talked about two billion people in the world today who have little to no knowledge of this good news. They're unreached by the gospel. Let's revisit a map that we looked at last week that illustrates the number and locations of unreached people around the world.

If you remember and for those of you who weren't here, the green on this map represents places where there is an established or significant church. It obviously does not mean that these are Christian places or that everybody in these places is a Christian. But it means that these are places in the world where churches have been



established that are proclaiming the gospel. The yellow on this map represents places where there's a formative or nominal church. Think of it as being a weaker church presence, or maybe having churches that are not proclaiming the gospel.

Then red represents unreached or least reached places. Those are places in the world where there is relatively little gospel access. That means there are few churches preaching the gospel and few Christians proclaiming the gospel. Last week we talked about how God is calling some—not all, but some, maybe many—followers of Jesus to leave where they live in the green to go to places and people in the red where the gospel has not yet gone. We read together Acts 13 and saw how the church in Antioch was worshiping, fasting and praying one day, then God set apart some people from that church to leave Antioch and spread the gospel where it had not yet gone.

So we said last Sunday that this next week, we're going to pray, fast and come back together this Sunday, asking God to lead. We're not just going through religious motions, coming to a worship service and moving on. We are meeting with God right now, in this church and today specifically, asking, "God, who among us are You calling out to leave Washington, DC, for the spread of the gospel to places it has not gone?"

What this means is that at the end of our time together today, I'm going to give two invitations. First, I'm going to invite people to place your faith in Jesus and make that public through baptism. Then, at the end of the time we have, I'm going to ask every follower of Jesus, "Do you believe God may be leading you to leave Metro Washington, DC, for at least two months?" So we're talking about longer than one- or two-week mission trip. This means anywhere between two months and the rest of your life, leaving here to spread His gospel among unreached people and places in the world.

I want to emphasize "may"—do you believe God may be leading you?—because I want to encourage you that this is not a decision you need to make on your own. This is a decision we as a church will come alongside you as you make it. That's what happened in Acts 13—the church affirmed Paul and Barnabas going out from them for the spread of the gospel. So if you say today, "I believe God may be leading me in this way," then today will begin a process during which we want to sit down with you and discern if God is indeed leading you in this way and what that might look like.

So at the end of our time in the Word, I'm going to invite people who believe God may be leading you in this way to stand. We're going to gather around you and pray for you, like they did in Acts 13, as you begin this process. With these two invitations in mind, I want to pray specifically for what's about to happen. Will you bow your heads with me? Let's come before God together right now and pray.

God, we pray that in the next few minutes, You would bring many people to believe in Jesus. We pray that by Your Spirit, You would open eyes to people's need for Jesus and bring them to trust in Jesus. We pray that You would give them and others who have not yet been baptized the courage to publicly confess faith in Jesus through baptism. Then we pray, O God, that You would call out students, singles, husbands and wives, moms and dads, grandparents, retirees from all across this gathering to move for a period of time to places where the gospel has not yet gone. We all put our lives, including my own, on the table right now before You, asking You, Holy Spirit, who are You calling out from among us? Please speak to us, O God, by Your Spirit now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's just be honest here. From the start, what we're talking about today is crazy. Why would any one of us leave the comforts of life here and move to a remote village in Afghanistan, or a 100% Muslim city in the Middle East, or an impoverished refugee camp in Bangladesh? These may sound like extreme examples, but they're not. Unreached people are unreached for a reason. They're difficult to reach and in some situations they are dangerous to reach. We've said before that all the easy ones are taken. So why

would you leave here to go there—as a single, as a couple, as a family with young kids or teenagers, as a grandparent with grandkids you want to spend time with, as a retiree? Why would you spend your last years there instead of here?

In order to answer that question, I want to flip the question and ask, “What happens if we don’t go? What happens if we stay here?” We have said that over two billion people are in the red area right now, people just like you and me. They are singles, couples, moms, dads, kids, grandkids—just like our kids—who don’t have access to the gospel in these places in the world.

Practically, what that means is that if you live in an unreached part of the world, the likelihood is that you will be born, live and die without ever even hearing the gospel, without ever even hearing the good news of God’s love in Jesus. No one will ever tell you the truth about what God has done to save you from your sin.

Well, if that’s the case, it begs the question what happens to those people when they die? What happens to people who have never heard the gospel when they die? That’s a pretty important question for over two billion people in the world. I think most Christians in America, where the gospel is accessible, either don’t know that there are over two billion people in the world who have never heard the gospel or they hardly ever think about that. They prefer to think about things right around us in the world here and not that reality in the world there. Or, if we know this, most Christians assume that surely those people will be okay in eternity, even if they’ve never heard the gospel.

I heard a pastor of a really large church in my hometown last week who stated, “God is loving, so assuming people genuinely try to please God with their lives, they will go to heaven.” Is that what the Bible teaches? Unfortunately, we don’t have a verse in the Bible that I could read to those of you who may wonder what happens to people who never hear about Jesus. There is not one definitive verse from which we can say, “Here’s the answer.” But that doesn’t mean the Bible is silent on this question.

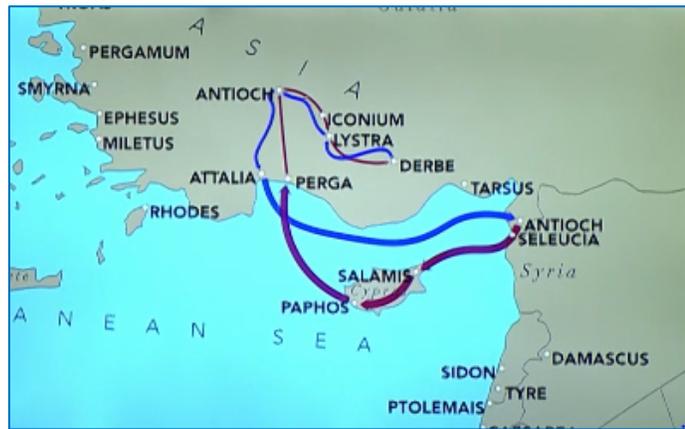
In fact, we have an entire book in the Bible written to answer this question. It’s the book we’ve been reading as a church over the last week—the book of Romans. Let me show it to you. Look at the end of the book, at Romans 15:18, because at the end of the book, Paul—who’s writing this letter to the church at Rome—tells us why he’s writing the letter. Follow along with me as I read Romans 15:18-25:

*<sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; <sup>20</sup> and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”*

*<sup>22</sup> This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. <sup>23</sup> But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be*

*helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>25</sup> At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.*

Let me help you understand what we just read. Last week I used some maps and talked about how Paul and Barnabas left Antioch to spread the gospel where it had not gone. Let's pick up where we left off last week with these maps. Antioch is over on the far right, in the eastern part of this map. The reddish arrows represent Paul and Barnabas going out from Antioch, taking the gospel to places where it had not yet gone. In all these cities, they're sharing the gospel, people are coming to faith in Christ and they're gathering together in churches. The blue arrows represent them coming back to Antioch. That was Paul's first journey into places where the gospel had not yet gone, sent out by the church in Antioch.



That sets the stage for the second journey he took. This time Paul went north with Silas and they picked up Timothy along the way. They first went to places where Paul had already gone, then God told them, "I want you to go to new places where the gospel has not yet gone." They went north to Philippi, Thessalonica, then down to

Corinth, then Athens and Ephesus. All these were places where people were coming to faith in Jesus for the first time and churches were being started for the first time. Then they went down to Jerusalem and eventually returned to Antioch, which was kind of the home base for Paul.

That then set the stage for his third journey. This time he leaves Antioch and goes to all the places he's already been. No new territory. But when he gets to Corinth on this



third journey, he sits down and writes a letter. You'll never guess what letter that is. The book of Romans. He writes a letter to the church in Rome.

So let's ask the question why would Paul sit down in Corinth thinking, "I want to write a letter to the church at Rome," in which he says, "I'm going to Jerusalem to take an offering for the saints there, but then I want to come to you." Why did he want to go to Rome?

Well, let's broaden the map and see this picture. Here's Antioch on the right, then Jerusalem and



Corinth, where Paul writes this letter. And here's Rome.

Paul says to the church at Rome, "There is no more work for me to do in these regions." That is an outlandish statement. "Are you serious, Paul? No more work to do? Is everybody a Christian in these regions?" No. Everybody was

not a Christian in these regions. But disciples had been made, churches had been planted and the gospel was being proclaimed. Paul says, "It's time to move on to where the gospel has not yet gone, where they've not yet heard. That's why I'm writing a letter to you in Rome, because I need you to help me get the gospel to Spain."

Now it makes sense why he wasn't planning to go back to Antioch. Is Antioch the best place to help him get the gospel to Spain? No. He's writing a letter to the church at Rome to show them why they need to work to help him get the gospel to those who've never heard it in Spain.

Just a side note here that's really significant. Every time I or anybody talks about taking the gospel to unreached peoples and places around the world, some Christians will chime in and say, "Well, why do we need to focus there when there's so much need here?" Paul, why go to Spain? There's need in Corinth. If you read 1 Corinthians, it's a messed-up place. There are tons of need there. Why are we talking about getting the gospel to Spain? In the same way, people will say, "Why are we talking about going to Afghanistan or Turkey? Don't you see all the need in Washington, DC? Don't you care about here?"

Some Christians would actually prefer we not talk a lot about global missions. Well, Satan would prefer that as well, but I want to encourage you not to be in his camp. God wants all the nations to know His love, including the nations right here and the nations far from here. So absolutely there's need in

Washington, DC and God is calling many of us to spend our lives for the spread of the gospel right here, just like many of the people back then stayed in Antioch.

But God is also calling many people to live for the spread of the gospel there. For those God called to stay here, God calls us to pray and work and give to support those who are going there. We have a whole book in the Bible telling the church to work together to get the gospel where it has not yet gone. That's why we're doing what we're doing today. That's why we're praying for God to send people out. From the 10,000 people gathered at MBC today, surely He's calling some, maybe many, to go to the two billion people who've never even heard His name.

That does not mean we don't care about Washington, DC. It means we care about what God cares about—Washington, DC and the world, including the Afghans, Turks, the Baloch in Pakistan, the Rohingya in Myanmar and the Darfur in Sudan. These are not our enemies. These are people created by God whom He loves and for whom He has sent His Son to die. We've got to ask the question, "What happens to those people if we don't go?"

Well, let's ask the book of Romans, since that's why Paul is writing this letter. I'm going to show you seven truths in the book of Romans that answer what happens if we don't go and share the gospel with those who have not heard it. We're going to hit them pretty quickly, but see and hear what God teaches us in His Word.

## **Truth #1 – All people know God.**

Look at Romans 1:18-20 (NIV):

*<sup>18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

Then it says in verse 21, "For although they knew God..." Plain and simple, the Bible is saying here that all people everywhere, all over this map, have knowledge of God. No matter where they live, God has made Himself known clearly, in creation, in our hearts, so that all are without excuse. No one can say, "You didn't show Yourself." He has shown Himself to all. Of course, not all people say they believe in God.

## **Truth #2 – All people reject God.**

Let's go on to Romans 1:21-25:

*<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.*

*<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. <sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

This is the reality of sin in every person's heart—in my heart, in your heart and in every person around the world. We have all sinned against God, turned from His ways to our own ways, from His truth to our thoughts (Romans 3:23). All of us have.

### **Truth #3 – There are no innocent people.**

These initial verses in Romans 1-3 are some of the most sobering verses in all of Scripture. From Romans 1:18 to 2:16, Paul talks about the sinfulness of the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people. And you can almost hear the Jewish people amending every verse. “Yes, they are bad.” Then he gets to Romans 2:17 and he says, “Now you. If you call yourself a Jew, if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship with God, if you know His will and approve what is superior because you’ve been instructed by the law...” Then he starts talking about their sinfulness. He starts talking about how God’s name has been blasphemed among the Gentiles because of them. It all comes to a head in Romans 3:9-20, where we see this summary of humanity beginning in verse ten:

*<sup>10</sup> As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*

*<sup>13</sup> “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.”*

*“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”*

*<sup>14</sup> “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”*

*<sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

*<sup>16</sup> ruin and misery mark their ways,*

*<sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they do not know.”*

*<sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

In other words, all people everywhere are guilty of sin before a holy God. Here's why this point is so important. So many times this question is asked: “Pastor, what happens to the innocent man or woman or child in this remote part of the world who's never heard the gospel when they die?”

If you were to ask me that question, I would say, “Without question, based on the Bible, those people go to heaven even though they’ve never heard the gospel. Without question, an innocent man, woman, child would go to heaven without ever hearing the gospel, because they have no need to hear the gospel. If they’re innocent of sin, they don’t need to hear that Jesus died to save them from sin. If they’re innocent of sin, they’ll go straight to heaven. Of course they’ll go to heaven.”

The only problem is those people do not exist. Do you see how we bias the question from the start, toward us and our good and away from God? God is unjustly sentencing people to eternal judgment who are innocent. That’s not true. There are no innocent people in the world just waiting to hear the gospel. There are guilty people all over the world—that’s why they need to hear the gospel.

#### **Truth #4 – All people stand condemned for rejecting God.**

Which leads to truth number four: all people stand condemned for rejecting God. It’s so sobering, but Romans 3:19-20 sums it up like this:

*<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.*

*<sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

In other words, not only are all people guilty, silenced before God, but there is no amount of good we can do to overcome our guilt. All people are condemned for rejecting God, regardless of whether or not we’ve heard the gospel. This too is really significant, because I think many professing Christians think like the pastor I mentioned before. Unfortunately, I would say the majority of the pastors in America are teaching that if certain people never hear the gospel, God is loving so He will let them into heaven. God loves them, even though they never had a chance to hear.

Absolutely, God is loving. I feel the emotion in the question. Truly, I feel it. I’ve met so many of these people all around the world—men, women, kids—who’ve never heard the gospel. But if it’s true that they will go to heaven precisely because they’ve never heard the gospel, then what is the worst thing we could possibly do for their eternal state? Go and tell them the gospel, right? Like then they would lose their free pass to heaven.

Think about it. Unreached people, before we go there with the gospel, 100% of them were going to heaven. Now after we come, they might go to hell. “Thanks a lot. Keep your gospel to yourself. Live it up over there—don’t come here.” Just think practically. Right here in our city, there are people from the nations, some of whom have not heard the gospel. The difference is they have access to it here, but not in other countries.

But imagine you meet somebody on the street and you ask, “Do you know about Jesus?” They say, “No, I’ve never heard about Jesus.” Okay, if you believe that person standing in front of you is going to heaven precisely because they’ve never heard about Jesus, then what are you going to tell them? You’re going to say, “Well, if anybody tries to tell you about Him, put your fingers in your ears and yell really loud and run away.” Right?

That totally undercuts everything we see in Scripture. We’re told to go to the nations for a reason. The point here is that regardless of whether or not somebody’s heard the gospel, all stand guilty before God in sin, deserving of eternal separation from Him. I picture Paul in tears, putting the pen down and just weeping. Then, I picture him taking up that pen, wiping his tears and continuing:

*<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

### **Truth #5 – God has made a way of salvation for the lost.**

God has chosen to pour out the judgment due sin upon His Son in the place of sinners. making a way of salvation for the lost. God has made a way. We have all sinned against God—every single person in this room and every single person in the world. We are all separated from God. If we die in the state of separation from God, we will spend eternity separated from God in judgment for our sin.

But, yes, God is loving. He loves us and has made a way for us to be saved from our sin. God has sent His Son Jesus to pay the price for our sin. Jesus has taken all the payment due your sin upon Himself on the cross, then He has risen from the dead in victory over sin. Therefore, anyone anywhere on this map—it doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done—God has made a way of salvation for you.

The way is faith in Jesus. The way is not you working your way to God. The way is you trust in what God has done to make His way to you. This is the greatest news in all the world. God will save you from all your sin and give you eternal life with Him if you will trust in His love for you. So do that today. If you have never done that, I exhort you, I urge you to trust in Jesus today. Believe in Jesus and be baptized.

### **Truth #6 – People cannot come to God apart from faith in Christ.**

Romans 3:27 states, “*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.*” On what principle? That of observing the law based on what you do? No, but on that of faith. Verse 28: “*For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the*

*God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised,” that is, the Jewish people, “by faith and the uncircumcised,” the Gentiles, “through that same faith.”*

This picture goes on through Romans 4-8 and it’s all by faith. This is how you and I and people all over the world can be saved from sin, by faith in Jesus. But that brings us back to our question, doesn’t it? How, then, can people put their faith in Jesus if they never hear of Jesus? And that is the exact question, the exact words Paul uses in Romans 10. Turn there with me. Romans 10, beginning in verse 13 (NIV):

*<sup>13</sup> “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” <sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

The picture here is crystal clear. People cannot put their faith in Jesus if they never hear about Jesus. If you keep going in your Bible, you can look at Romans 10:17, where it says, *“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”* People can’t put their faith in Jesus if they don’t hear about Jesus. If they don’t put their faith in Jesus, they cannot be saved from their sin. So get the picture. Over two billion people cannot go to heaven if they don’t have faith in Jesus, but they cannot have faith in Jesus if they don’t hear about Jesus. It’s simple logic. If you keep going with simple logic, they won’t hear unless somebody tells them.

## **Truth #7 – Christ commands His church to make the gospel known in all nations.**

I want you to look in Romans 10 at the verbs in this passage in reverse. As you do, you will see God’s plan for how the gospel will go to all the nations. How is the gospel going to go to all those people? Watch this. Start at the end.

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news...”*—those who are sent out. This is where it starts. Jesus sends out His followers to all nations. *“How can anyone preach unless they are sent?”* So what do those who are sent do? They preach. Followers proclaim the gospel to all nations. When you see that word “preach,” it’s not to stand up in front of a lot of people on a big stage. No, this is just speaking the gospel to other people—proclaiming the gospel.

Jesus sends His followers to all nations, His followers proclaim the gospel to all nations, and when that happens, what’s next? *“How can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* So when we preach, people in all nations will hear. Unless we’re proclaiming the gospel to a wall, when we share the gospel people will hear it. When people hear, *“How will they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”* When they hear, what will they do? Hearers in all nations will believe.

Now, we know not everybody who hears the gospel when we share it will believe. We know that happens around us right here, as well as different places around the world. But don't miss this: we have confidence that some will believe. Remember the end of the story in Revelation 7? There's coming a day when people from every nation, tribe and tongue—all the people groups represented on this map—are one day going to be gathered around the throne of Jesus, singing His praises for His salvation.

Do you know what that means? That means you or I can go anywhere on that map, share the gospel with people there and somebody's coming out. I guarantee somebody's coming out. Hearers in all nations will believe, and when they believe, *"How can they call on the one they have not believed in?"* Believers in all nations will call on Jesus and those who call from all nations will be saved. So there it is. There's the plan.

Now, look back at the plan and ask the question where is the only place this plan can break down? Let's go from the end.

- Will those who call on the name of the Lord be saved? Yes. Guaranteed.
- Will those who believe call? Yes. Those who believe will call on the name of the Lord and be saved.
- Will those who hear believe? Again, we said not all will, but some will—guaranteed. Those who hear will believe.
- When followers of Jesus proclaim the gospel, will people hear? Yes. Unless we're talking to a wall, they will hear.
- Then jump to the beginning. Is Jesus still sending His followers or has He taken a generation off? I don't think He has. Jesus is still sending His followers. The only potential breakdown in the plan is when followers of Jesus who have the gospel decide not to go and proclaim the gospel to people who have not heard it, when followers of Jesus say, "We're just going to live our lives in places where the gospel has gone; we're not going to leave and go where it hasn't."

People look at this map and say, "Well, surely God has other ways, right? God is working through dreams and visions. Don't you hear stories about dreams and visions across the Muslim world?" Yes, absolutely. God works in all kinds of ways, including dreams and visions. But you will not find one verse in the Bible where the gospel is going forward apart from a human instrument proclaiming it. Even with Cornelius's dream/vision, "Peter, get up and go there..." (Acts 10). It's always through people.

Could God use other means? Sure He could. God has the power to write the book of Romans in the sky tonight, then boom, they're all reached. But He's not doing that. Do you know why? Because God in His sovereign wisdom and kindness has chosen to use you and me to carry the greatest news to the ends of the earth. If we don't go, they won't hear, they won't believe, they won't call and they won't be saved. Do you see it, church? We are Plan A for the spread of the gospel to the nations and there is no Plan B.

This is why we, as a church, will be disobedient to Jesus if we do not send out and support followers of Jesus who are taking the gospel where it has not yet gone. There are two billion people in the world—men and women and kids—who don't need a church of 10,000 in Metro Washington, DC, with millions of dollars at our disposal, saying, "We're just going to focus right here." Those two billion people need a church in Metro Washington, DC, that's making disciples and multiplying churches right here in Metro Washington, DC and sending disciples of Jesus to places where the good news of God's love has still not gone.

We need to be sending disciples in all kinds of ways, through all kinds of jobs. You see, God has ordained this through the government taking you around the world, through professions in medicine, teaching, engineering, as students, professionals, retirees. What better way to spend your retirement than introducing people to Jesus who have never even heard His name? That is better than golf in south Florida. What do you want to be doing in your last few years before you see your Savior's face? Make them count. The harvest is plentiful, but the problem is the workers are few.

God, send out many workers.

You might think, "David, what kind of difference can my life really make? What kind of difference can one church really make?" Well, let's consider Paul—one man who wrote this book. Think about the last map that shows Corinth where he wrote this book to Rome, hoping to take the gospel to Spain. I know it's hard to see, but it shows a little bit of yellow right around Rome, around Antioch and north of Jerusalem. Those yellow areas represent places that were known to contain Christians at the beginning of Paul's journeys, before he was sent out from Antioch.

Now look at this map that shows the regions known to contain Christians at the end of these three journeys that Paul took. Can tell a difference? See the yellow light up in the specific places where Paul had traveled with the gospel. I'm not saying Paul was the only one who was impacting this map, but in light of the journeys we just saw, I would say Paul had a significant influence on that map.



But notice what is not yellow—Spain. Paul goes to Jerusalem, just like he said, but ended up getting arrested there. He goes to Rome, but not in the way he planned—he was in chains. As far as we know, he never made it to Spain. So what are we to conclude? Paul tried, but failed. He wanted his life to count by getting the gospel to those who had never heard it over here, but it didn't happen.



Before we draw that conclusion though, let me show you one more map. This map is going to show you the regions that were known to contain Christians within two short centuries after Paul’s death. I’m not saying Paul was the only one who impacted this map, but I am saying do not underestimate for a second what God will do through one life, one

family, one church family, for the spread of His good news in the world.

So my question is, MBC church family, what kind of impact are we going to have on this map we looked at earlier that represents our world? Think about us right here. We have 100 plus nations represented in our church in one of the most significant cities in the world. God has put us in a prime position to impact this map, if we will take it.



Based on the Word of God, let’s take it. Like we’re doing today, let’s periodically lay our lives on the table—all of us, including me and my family—and just ask, “God, are You setting some

of us apart to go?” Then we just do whatever God says to do. So that’s what we’re going to do right now. I want to ask the question to every single follower of Jesus in this room and on other campuses, “In light of this gospel and in light of the need, is God calling you to leave Metro Washington, DC, for at least two months, maybe much longer, to spread His gospel among unreached people and places in the world?”

If you think God may be leading you to that, then in just a second I’m going to ask you to stand. I want to be clear. Your standing does not mean you’re committing to pack your bags tomorrow and be gone. Standing doesn’t mean you’ve got it all figured out. Your standing is saying, “I believe God may be calling me in this way, so today I want to share that with the church. I want to start a process that, if God continues to lead, will move in that direction.” It may be soon or it may be a while from now. I want to give those who stand a way to communicate with us, then we’ll begin the process today of praying and seeking God with you along these lines.

I also want to be clear that if you are standing, that will not mean that you are a super Christian; and if you are sitting, that will not mean that you are a lesser Christian. There’s no such thing as two-

tiered Christianity. The ultimate issue in this moment is not whether you are standing or sitting. The ultimate issue is whether you are obeying God's Spirit in your life.

Along those lines, some of you are married and if one of you is sensing God may be leading you in this way, but you don't know what your spouse is thinking right now, obviously this is something you need to talk about with them. But here's what I want to invite you to do. Even if just one of you is thinking this, I want to invite both of you to stand. If you weren't planning on standing and you see your husband or wife standing next to you, then you stand with them. In that, just be saying together, "At least one of us is sensing this in our hearts, so we want people to pray with us and for us."

Likewise if you have kids who obviously would be affected by this, I would invite them to stand with you as well. Or maybe there are teenagers who are sensing God speaking to you about spending your life where the gospel has not gone, but you may not be ready to move out of your house right now; we want to begin praying with you about how God may be leading you in the future. So I want to invite you to stand if you are sensing God speaking to you in this way.

Parents, I invite you to stand with them in support of what God may be doing in their lives. I talk with so many high school, college and graduate students around the country who want to go to the nations, but their Christian parents are unwilling to help them get there. May that not be true among us. So the whole idea is if God is speaking in your heart for you to take a first step today, even just in prayer, please stand. Sound good?

All across this room, is God calling you to leave Metro Washington, DC, for at least two months, maybe longer, to spread His gospel among unreached people and places in the world? If you are sensing that God may be calling you to do this, then I want to invite you to stand where you are right now.

[Applause]

I want us to do Acts 13. I'm going to invite the rest of us to stand, then if there's anybody standing around you, gather around them and put a hand on their shoulder. If there's nobody already standing near you, just stay where you are. I'm going to lead us in prayer for these folks.

Let's pray together.

O God, we confess together today as a church that You are Lord of the nations, that one day every knee represented on this map will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. God, we want them to know Your love, grace and salvation before they stand face to face with You in sin. So please, God, please bless, lead and guide these brothers and sisters who have stood. We praise You for Your grace in them. We praise You for saving them from their sins. We praise You for all You've done to bring them to this point.

So God, we pray that You would lead them from this point in every single detail. We pray more than anything for their union and intimacy with You, and that You would keep them close to You. We

know that as they take this step, that's just stepping into more spiritual warfare. So we pray for their protection, for Your guidance and direction in their lives, and that You would direct their every step now and in the days to come.

God, we ask boldly that there would be people groups and places on that map that go from red to green because of lives in this room. We ask that there would be individuals who hear the gospel for the first time because of lips in this room. For all those who are sitting at this moment, we pray that You would help us be faithful disciple makers among the nations here and that we would not expect these who are standing to make all the sacrifices, but that we would sacrifice to support them and help them in the work to which You've called them and us together.

God, make us a church that counts for Your glory among the nations. Please, may it be so, that indeed in the days to come, You would send these out in the power of Your Spirit in ways that resound to Your glory, the good of the nations and our joy. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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