

Why World Evangelization?  
Selected passages including Genesis 10  
Dr. Jerry Nelson  
www.soundliving.org

What difference does it make to me if the whole world does or does not hear the good news about Jesus' offer of life?

I couldn't find the exact quote but I think it was Samuel Johnson who wrote, "Nothing focuses the mind like a hanging." I think that is true; the thought of death does tend to sort out the significant from the insignificant. It does lead us to simplify life to what is most important. A friend of mine (exaggerating I think) says the first thing he does in the morning is read the obituaries and if he's not listed in them he goes to work. The thought of death does simplify things. I don't mean it makes things easy but it does tend to help us focus on the essentials.

Let me tell you what essentials I mean. In the mid-1990s we heard much about the life and death of Jerry Garcia, the lead singer for the popular rock music group called "The Grateful Dead". Pun intended, do you think Jerry Garcia is "grateful" today. I did not know Mr. Garcia but I think his death begs the question - "Where is he today?" Did he cease to exist or are there other options?

We read almost daily of the death toll from the bombings various parts of the world. We see the pictures of bodies carried out of the wreckage of buildings. Where are those people now? They died. Is that the end of them?

Most of us have been to the funeral of a friend or a family member. We see that casket and very basic questions arise: "Is that the end? Are they gone forever? Will we ever see them again? Where are they now?"

Jesus said, as recorded in John 3:16 that "whoever believes in me shall not perish but have eternal life." That is consistent with what he said at other times and what the whole Bible teaches; there are two and only two possible answers to the question "Where is Jerry Garcia today or where are those victims of the bombings or where are our acquaintances and loved ones who have died?" Do you hear the two possible answers in Jesus words? "Whoever believes in me shall not perish but have eternal life." Now I know this is basic theology for most of you but I am building the foundation for the point of today's message - which is: "Each one of us personally has a responsibility for world evangelization!" The two possible answers for what happens to people at death is given quite clearly in the Bible: Here's the one answer given by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Thessalonica: At the end of this age, "The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Isn't that what Jesus said? "Whoever believes in me will have everlasting life." Here's the other possible answer to the question "What happens to people when they die?": Again reading from the Bible from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian Christians: When the Lord comes from heaven "he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power..." The Apostle John describes it as those who do not know Christ shall be resurrected and thrown into the "lake of fire." We usually describe these two possible answers to the question of what happens to people at death as "heaven" or "hell." I know that the fertile imaginations of people have conjured up other alternatives such as people simply cease to exist at death or people are reincarnated or probably some other alternatives but the truth is that the Bible flatly contradicts such alternatives by admitting only two possible answers. "He who believes in me," Jesus said, "shall not perish but have eternal life."

Now if you accept that from God's Word as true (and I know that most of you do) then that raises the next question: How is it determined whether a person goes to heaven or hell? I can probably answer that most simply by using the words of the Apostle John from the Bible: "He who has the son of God has life, he who does not have the son of God does not have life." A person who is rightly related to God now and has God's life in them will continue to live even though his or her body dies. They're given life now and that life just continues on even through the death of their body. And that life is united with a new body when Jesus comes again. Conversely, a person who is now spiritually dead, who has not received God's life now, will continue to be dead right through the physical death of their body and on into eternity. They are spiritually dead now and they will remain spiritually dead forever.

How then is it determined whether a person will go to heaven or hell? "He who has the Son of God has life, he who does not have the son of God does not have life." God is very clear on this issue: Jesus said it this way: God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through His Son!" Put even more strongly he said in John 14, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Unfortunately even some Evangelicals today are suggesting that it is possible for people to have spiritual life without ever knowing of Jesus. But Jesus, himself, is the one who said "No one comes to the Father except through me." The Apostle Paul writing to the Romans said it just as clearly: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved." In spite of the sophisticated arguments to the contrary the Bible says that no one can come into right relationship with God, no one receives God's eternal life, without accepting Jesus Christ as saving-Lord.

I have put before you two essential issues:

When a person dies they go either to heaven or hell AND whether they go to heaven or hell is determined by their response to one person - Jesus Christ.

Do you believe that is true?

What I have written thus far is not simplistic but simply basic; It is foundational to the whole issue of World Evangelization. If people simply cease to exist at death then the Bible is wrong and Jesus is unnecessary and there is no gospel - there is no 'good news' to tell. If everyone goes to heaven or hell regardless of their response to Jesus then, again, world evangelization is unnecessary. But God says, " Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved."

Why World Evangelization? Because "God so loved the world that he gave his only unique Son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."

Do you believe that is true?

The Bible teaches that unless Jerry Garcia trusted in Jesus Christ for his salvation - he is in hell. Unless those bombing victims had accepted Jesus as their saving-Lord they are eternally separated from God. Unless my friends and loved ones who have died had placed their faith in Jesus for life - they are destined for eternal destruction. Ezekiel 33:11 declares that the Sovereign Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but it doesn't change the fact - without Christ anyone will perish.

Why World Evangelization? The Apostle Paul answered the question positively when he wrote to the Romans: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in one they have not heard of? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

It's really quite simple isn't it? Only through Jesus can people know God, have his life and live forever in his presence.

**And God has determined that those who know him are the ones to tell those who don't.**

Jesus said to his first followers, men who know much about fishing, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men!" After he had spent 3 years with them he commissioned them with these words: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The Apostle Paul later took that commission that already implicitly applied to all of us and made it explicit when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5: "God has given us the ministry of reconciliation: namely that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us."

**"Those who know Him, telling those who don't" has always been God's way.**

I think many evangelicals have an immature understanding of what it means to be a Christian. We become so preoccupied with meeting our perceived needs, so concerned about getting all the blessings God has to offer, that we begin to think of Christianity as primarily God's means to give us everything we ever wanted or needed - thinking that God saved us to bless us.

Maybe we move a level beyond that and think of Christianity as God's means for fitting us for heaven. And so we give ourselves to spiritual disciplines and godly living and inspect ourselves carefully for unholy action - thinking that God saved us to make us holy.

Is it God's intention to bless us? Of course! Is it God's intention to make us holy? Of course! But why then does God not simply save us and take us to heaven? What is his purpose in blessing us and helping us to become more like Christ?

I want you to look at four passages of Scripture with me. First is Genesis 12:2-3. Why did God choose Abraham and bless Abraham? I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth.”

We are tempted to think of the Old Testament as a book by Hebrews, about the Hebrews and for the Hebrews. We might imagine that two-thirds of the Bible written for a little group of people and ignoring the rest of the human race. Yes, it is true that much of the Old Testament is written about a little group of people but it is not written just for them.

Look at Chapter 10 of Genesis. Here you find a listing of the nations of the world - not just the Hebrews who come into existence later. In Chapter 11 (tower of Babel) we again read about the rebellion of people against God (just as before the flood). They basically said they didn't need God or want him. God responds to that rebellion by scattering them all over the earth - by doing what he had told Adam and Eve to do centuries earlier (Genesis 1:28 “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it) and what he had told Noah's sons to do after the flood (Genesis 9:1 “Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth”). For reasons we can only guess at the author of Genesis chose to put the result (chapter 10) before the cause (chapter 11). In Genesis 11 God scattered them in order to save them from themselves.

And so you have in Chapter 10 the list of the nations that had been scattered. Having specifically listed the nations of the world God then introduces us to Abraham. Now very importantly, what is God's purpose with Abraham? To carve out a little group and let the rest of the nations go? NO! Genesis 12 through the rest of the Old Testament is God's dealing with one people whom he desires to use to reach all peoples. That truth is repeated over and over again through the pages of the Old Testament. Look with me please at Isaiah 49:6. This is written centuries after Noah and Abraham. The Hebrews had time and time again failed to be a light to the nations.

So God sends the prophet Isaiah to remind them again of their purpose. Listen to his words: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." God did not call the Hebrews, the Israelites primarily to privilege, he called them to service. They were called to glorify God among the nations. Israel was to be a living demonstration of the way God created us to be. They were to demonstrate a right relationship with God. They were to demonstrate a right relationship with each other. Israel was to be a missionary people - proclaiming their God to the ends of the earth - to all the nations. From the beginning, God's heart has been for the whole world! But time and again God's people failed to be the light God called them to be.

Then we come to the New Testament. Now God, himself, came to earth in the person of His SON - Jesus. Jesus said clearly that **he was the light - the light his people were to reflect to those around them.** And once again God reiterates his purposes for his people: Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Jesus then established a new people to be a light to the nations. He establishes his church.

Using language strikingly similar to the language used of Israel when she had been called to be God's light to the nations, The Apostle Peter tells the purpose of God's church on earth: 1 Peter 2:9ff "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light... v12 "Live such good lives among the pagans (the nations) that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" - that is when Jesus comes again.

The Church, Christians have not been called primarily to privilege - we have been called to serve. Christians are called to be living demonstrations of the way God created us to be - rightly related to God and to each other. The church has been called to be a missionary people - proclaiming our God to the ends of the earth.

Why World Evangelization? Because we have been mandated by our God to tell about Jesus. Am I personally responsible for world evangelization? Simply put, if I claim to be a follower of Christ (a Christian) then I will be doing what he did - I will be a light to the nations. I believe that the mandate of Jesus to his church is a mandate to us all. And it is a mandate not just to the leadership of a church but is a mandate for every man, woman, boy or girl who is a true Christian.

Do you remember back at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 10, we looked at a list of the nations of the world - those nations that God intended to reach through his

people? Look now at the end of the Bible and see what God promises will happen: Revelation 7:9: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne, and in front of the Lamb - Jesus. They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands (symbolic of their right relationship to God) and they cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Jesus, himself, promised in Matthew 24:14 that this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world, as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come."

From one end of the Bible to the other - God's purpose has been the same: Those who know telling those who don't. And the beautiful thing is - though his people have failed time and time again - God will not fail. He will use his church and even us if we are faithful, to bring the gospel to every people. I WANT TO BE A PART OF THAT, DON'T YOU!