

Are You There God? Part 3

Art:

Welcome to MC3 today, we are so glad that you are here. We started a new sermon series this month, where many of you submitted some really deep and thought provoking theological questions last month. Today we are going to tackle some questions pertaining to salvation and the existence of hell. But before we jump in, we wanted to remind you of the goals of this series: **1. We want to lead you to the Truth. 2. We want to lead you to seek God. 3. We want you to be satisfied with Jesus.** Remember the only question we really need to have nailed down in this life, is the question of what to do with Jesus. So our hope is that at the end of the day, you will be satisfied with Him. And it's good to have Will up here today, and so we are going to tag-team today on these tough, but all-important questions. So with that here's our first question . . .

How do we show the love of Jesus to those in our lives that do not believe in God? What happens when you approach someone and they are immediately offended by your presence because they know you are a believer and they cannot understand? I know just keep coming back and showing kindness but what if they take that as offensive?

Jim: How do we do that to those that might be offended by our message and even our presence?

The second part of this question is difficult, but I have to tell you when I first saw that question, I had an immediate flashback to an episode of *The Golden Girls* where the sweetly, somewhat dimwitted character Rose reveals this irrational need to ensure that everyone likes her. And she goes to great lengths to make sure one of her coworkers likes her. Watch this:

Play The Golden Girls clip

So there's a pretty good example of what NOT to do when someone is offended by your efforts to be kind.

But seriously: How do you share Jesus with people who are offended because you are a believer ... and find your kindness offensive? My short answer is, maybe you don't. If they truly feel that way, I'm not sure you can have much influence on that kind of person.

It's interesting Art gave me this question because I have two examples that come to mind. The first concerns two people whom I love very much. One always tries to share Christ with the other --she inserts the Lord into almost every conversation and extols the virtues of attending church. And the other person just doesn't want to hear it. Feels badgered and takes offense at the well-intentioned, but sometimes overbearing, advice. All too often, their interactions end with hurt feelings. And, sadly, it ends up making one more determined to make their point and drives the other farther away from the Lord. It's a vicious cycle.

Now, this is clearly an extreme case. But I mention it, because there's a point when your efforts—no matter how sincere they are—begin producing negative returns. I can't help but think of [1 Corinthians 13:1](#), "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

Which is exactly what has happened between the two people I mentioned. The one person's good intentions have turned into browbeating ... to the extent that the other person frequently takes offense at their mere presence and is furthermore offended by not only their words but even by their Christian acts of kindness to other people. And instead of seeing the person's love for them, they see condemnation.

I share this story because it's important for us to share the love of Christ and the story of Christ with other people. But there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. God told us to share the gospel with others; he didn't tell us to pound people to pieces with it.

[Ephesians 4:29](#) reminds us to watch our words and speak "only what is helpful for building others as it fits the occasion" and according to their needs. Nagging is not helpful; it does not build up; it provides no benefits to the hearers.

When we run into people who find our Christianity offensive, or who are turned off by us, it may be a time for a little self-reflection. What's causing them to take offense? Is it our faith or the way we live our faith? Are we really showing kindness, or are we maybe being a little self-righteous and ingratiating? Have we become so fixated on our message that we're blind to the person on the receiving end? When you're trying to share Christ with someone, you need to avoid treating them as objects or projects to work on. That's one way to turn people off—to us, and to our message.

No doubt, we all encounter people who want nothing to do with Christ or faith. And when that happens, and you've made the effort, move on. But I personally think those people are few and

far between. There's a lot more folks who will be receptive to the message. Which brings me to the second example I wanted to share.

When we started our C-Group, I invited a young couple to join us. They came to our Super Bowl party but the next week, when the actual Bible study began, they offered an excuse why they couldn't make it. So I tried again the next week, and this time I received a text back saying, "Thanks for the invite, but we don't really do church anymore."

Now, how should I respond to that? I could have written them off, never responded and let the relationship wither. But go back to [1 Corinthians 13:2](#) "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing and have nothing to offer." Jesus Himself put it more simply in Matthew 22:37-40 when He said the two greatest commandments were to [love God and love people](#). All people, not certain people.

So instead of writing this young couple off, I responded positively to their message and reminded them that we would honor our vow to have them over for supper one night soon. They told me, "We don't do church anymore." In my book, that sounds like a golden opportunity to find out why they don't do church anymore and to share Christ with them. But it's important to meet them where they are, I think, and we'll start with dinner and then hopefully build the kind of relationship that allows me to ask why they don't come to church anymore and find out where they stand with Christ.

Because, ultimately, that is the goal—to make sure they know Christ.

Is there a real "Hell" and if so, what is it? What is it like and how could God enjoy Heaven if some of His creation is in turmoil?

Art:

What is hell like and how could God enjoy heaven with people in hell?

I think it is important to know why God created hell. Jesus gives us the answer to this In Matthew 25:41 where He says, "[Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.'](#)" Hell was created for the fallen angels, but because people choose to NOT follow God, this has also become the place where those outside of Christ will spend eternity.

It is very interesting that Jesus talked more about hell than He did about heaven. And Jesus had some interesting things to say about what hell is like. First, Jesus likened hell to a very visible place outside of Jerusalem, with which most of His audience would have been familiar, and that place was called "Gehenna."

Gehenna was a trash dump in Jesus's day, that was situated in a valley on the south side of the city. It was a place where fires were always burning. A place where dead animals and even criminals were left to rot or be set on fire. In the OT the valley at one point in time had been used as a place for human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech, in the days of the Ahaz and Manasseh (1 Kings 16:3). Later it was the place where good King Hezekiah piled the dead bodies of the 185,000 Assyrian soldiers that were struck down by an angel, and those bodies were set on fire (Isaiah 30:33). And so it had long been an illustration to the Jews of what hell might be like.

In Matthew 13:42, Jesus says hell is a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hell is a place that is devoid of God or any of the attributes of God.

And so Jesus says Mark 9:47-48, "And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 'where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.

But how could God enjoy heaven knowing people are in hell? First, because of Choice. God allows us the freedom to choose NOT to be with Him. And if someone chose NOT to follow God in this life, why would God make Him live in a place that is ALL about God. Secondly, because of Justice. God is Just . . . and what I mean by that is **God** is entirely correct and **just** in all His dealings with humanity. In Revelation 20:12 we are told, "I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books." So God knows our deeds, and deals justly with all people. **God is so righteous that nobody at all will be able to stand before Him on that day and say that something wasn't fair.**

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.--2 Peter 3:9

I have Jewish friends. If Jesus Christ is the Only way to gain entry to Heaven, what happens to the Jews? They serve the same God as we do and for thousands of years longer. Even Jesus was a Jew.

Jim: How would you answer this at first glance?

Jim

I didn't tell you this, Art, but when he gave me this question, my first thought was, "Ugh. Really." I mean, honestly, this is not a topic that intrinsically interests me. Nevertheless, you asked, and I couldn't say no.

And, really, it's a great question, and it's been a tremendous learning experience to dive deeper. Before this, I would have told you, "Well, the Jews are God's chosen people; He'll deal with them the way He sees best, and it's not for me to concern myself with."

There's a part of me that still feels this way. I know some people who believe Jews are all condemned to Hell because they rejected Christ. Well, I certainly don't subscribe to that theory, because Jews truly are God's chosen people.

Art and I spent time chatting about this. I had my ideas but wanted to make sure they were indeed scripturally based. And, Art, you gave me great scriptures and a great starting point.

Paul actually addresses this in Romans 2. Jesus was Jewish after all; the Apostles were all Jewish, and many of the early Christians were Jewish. But we have to remember that entry into heaven does NOT depend on religion. It depends on Jesus, on what we do with Jesus." John 14:6 tell us, "[I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.](#)"

So exactly how do you interpret that verse? Well, I believe, if I give my life to Christ, I'll be gifted eternal life in heaven. And if I reject Christ, I'm headed for hell.

But John 14:6 doesn't mirror my belief in those precise terms, does it? It simply says Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And no one can come to the Father except through me. In reality, none of us knows how Jesus will advocate for us before God, but I pray He will have incredible mercy on as many people as possible.

As I said, Paul addresses salvation and judgment for Jews in Romans 2. But to understand Romans 2, you really need to first read Chapter 1, where Paul describes God's anger at sin. He outlines what my Living Translation Bible commentary calls "a life completely given over to sin," and it's not a pretty picture.

Then we move into chapter 2, and it's important to know here that back in the day, the Jews essentially believed everyone was destined for judgment except themselves. They believed they were immune from God's wrath simply because they were Jews—God's chosen people.

Paul didn't buy into that idea, at least not after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Here's what he had to say about what happens to Jews—and gentiles—when it comes to judgment:

Romans 2:5-11: [“But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 He will judge everyone according to what they have done. 7 He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. 8 But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. 9 There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. 10 But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism.”](#)

If you continue in chapter 2, Paul really comes down hard on Jews. He essentially accuses them of hypocrisy—they were quick to point out everyone's faults but didn't think a thing about doing the exact same things they condemned. Verse 24 actually says: “No wonder the Scriptures say, “The world blasphemes the name of God because of you.”

That is harsh. And it scares me to death that if Paul were writing to us today, he might say the exact same thing. Hypocrisy is one of the chief reasons people point to when they refuse to come to church. They don't see any difference between our lives and their lives, between our behavior and their behavior. Think about it: We tell people knowing Christ makes all the difference, but they can't see any difference in us and themselves when it comes to the things we do; we guzzle beer, and watch crap on TV; we preach compassion and turn away from those in need; we shake our fist and rattle our swords at sins we don't like and tolerate and make excuses for those we commit because we just couldn't help ourselves. God will understand that we had good intentions, right, unlike all those folks who don't know Christ.

When it comes to Judgment Day, don't fool yourself. I certainly don't fool myself. I'm going to have a lot to answer for, a lot of wrong done and a lot of sin that will trade on the sacrifice Jesus made for me.

I could go on, but here's what I know and believe, according to what I read in the Bible. We humans, complicate things. We especially love to complicate matters of faith. And, man, do we find it easy to convince ourselves that we know best, that I know the heart of God and the will

of God better than anyone else, especially when it comes to passing judgement on others. But right and wrong are written deep in the heart of every man, woman and child, whether they are Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim or even atheist. And the Holy Spirit is our God-given conscience, telling us what is right and what is wrong. And how we respond to that will determine how we're judged.

I said earlier: When it comes to judgement, I pray God will have incredible mercy on as many people as possible. I know how much I need mercy. And the older I get and the closer I get to my Judgment Day, the less I feel the need to presume I know just how God is going to judge and Jesus is going to advocate for people.

I had an opportunity in 2017 to visit Southeast Asia with my middle daughter, Tyler. In Cambodia, our tour guide was a former Buddhist monk. We had an incredible interaction with this young man, and I was touched by his innate sense of right and wrong and his desire to do good. I never tried to share Christ with him. And I know some people will take me to task and, maybe rightly so, for not doing that. But the truth is: The Holy Spirit did not lead me there. But, I will tell you that for a long time—and still occasionally—I pray there's a place in Heaven for this man. I pray the Lord sees in him a man after His own heart, even though he doesn't KNOW Christ the way I know Christ.

I firmly believe we serve a fair and just God. And the Bible leads me to believe God will judge us—every man, woman and child who ever lived—according to what we know and had the chance to know, and how we lived, according to the right and wrong written in our heart.

So based on that, I don't think Jew or Gentile matters all that much when it comes to salvation and judgment. I do believe we have an obligation to share Jesus—to make him known to the world. But we have an equal obligation to obey God and to refrain from judging others. Christ said it himself in [Matthew 7:2: For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.](#)"

Art: And so, we have to trust that God will judge truthfully and accurately. We have to recognize that, as Romans 3:10 says, "[No one is righteous—not even one.](#)" Which is why Jesus came. He came first for the Jews, and then for the Gentiles. He so loved the world and was not willing that anyone should perish . . . perish from what? . . . perish in hell, that He gave His one and only Son, so that we might have everlasting life. So we have to decide what to do about Jesus. I can only accept Christ for myself, at the end of the day, I have to be satisfied with Jesus.

And so as we partake today, let us take communion satisfied . . . convinced that He is God, that He has made a way, that He will deal justly with everyone, and that we can rest in His salvation, that is freely given to everyone who comes to Him.