

Everybody's Saved, or Not

DAVE BAST

There is a question that all of us at one time or another have asked ourselves, our pastors, or our Christian teachers; and it is one we would like to ask God if we could. Here it is. How many people will be saved? What about people who do not believe in Christ? What about people who have never even heard of Christ; especially them? If there is a hell, is it populated? The Bible does speak to that question, and it speaks quite clearly. The problem is that it seems to say different things in different places. Today on *Groundwork*, we are going to dig into the question: Is everyone saved in the end or not?

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So, today we come to a pretty big one, Scott. It is the question, really, of universal salvation, and I just do not think there is anyone who has not struggled with this; I know I have, you have, and we start with the idea of, as one old hymn calls it, the wideness of God's mercy. There is a wideness to God's mercy like the wideness of the sea. And certainly that is a Biblical theme; in particular, a New Testament theme.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And indeed, that idea that salvation is big; that salvation is available. Scripture bears witness to this. Let's listen to the Apostle John in his first letter from 1 John 2:

^{1b}But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

DAVE BAST

Yes, there it is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Take that head-on and that sounds like Jesus has paid for all of the sins of the whole world and it would not be a huge leap in logic to go from that to say: Well, apparently it catches up everybody. Maybe everybody is saved.

DAVE BAST

Well, as he himself said in a text we looked at in an earlier program: I have other sheep not of this fold. I must bring them also. Couldn't those other sheep include just about everybody? Many kinds of surprising people? But then, when you come to the Epistles and Paul, there are some of the greatest, most moving passages that Paul wrote have this universalistic theme to them. Listen to this, for example, from Colossians 1:

¹⁶All things have been created through him and for him. (That is Christ. So, all things have been made for Christ.) ¹⁷He is before all things and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church, and he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile

to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

God has reconciled all things...

SCOTT HOEZEE

All things...

DAVE BAST

To himself in heaven and on earth through the blood of Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From the Greek phrase – the Greek words there are *ta panta*, which Paul puts all over the place in Colossians 1. It means everything, all things; and actually, if you were to go to the end of that passage, Dave, I think it is verse 23, where Paul will say: I am an apostle of this Gospel that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven; every creature under – I mean, Paul is being so expansive there; and similarly in Romans 5.

DAVE BAST

That does not just make it sound like all people are saved. That makes it sound like all spiritual beings...

SCOTT HOEZEE

The whole kit and caboodle...

DAVE BAST

Maybe Satan himself?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a very expansive text. Again, I mentioned Romans 5 just a second ago. Paul says: ¹⁷For if by the trespass of one man death reigned through that one man [Adam, the first Adam], how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Now here is the key: ¹⁸Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

So there again is Paul saying: Sounds like everybody. Sounds like everybody in Adam – in Adam's sin, we sinned all – but in Jesus all shall be made alive. Again, sounds universalistic – sounds like everybody is saved.

DAVE BAST

It is clearly a Biblical theme. It is clearly a strand in the New Testament. The question is: what do we do with the other side of the New Testament? The many, many texts that indicate the reality of judgment and hell?

That is what we are wrestling with in this program; but before we do that, in this segment let's just un-piece a little bit more of some of this universalistic teaching. There is a doctrine called universalism that says – in fact, it is actually a denomination of sorts – the Unitarian Universalist Church, and it emerged from New England in the 19th century, basically from Calvinists. That kind of universalism says, well, of course everyone is going to be saved. God is so nice; there is no way he would condemn anyone. It is a little vague on even if there is a personal God. Or sometimes people do not really think that humanity needs that much saving. You know, everybody is basically kind of good. On Biblical grounds, that is not the sort thing, I think, that these passages are getting at. They certainly are teaching that people need saving. What they are saying is that this happens in Jesus Christ. His work is so cosmic; his work is so great and so powerful that somehow it extends to all; and that is a position today that has sometimes been called *inclusivism*; that all are saved in Christ. Even if maybe they have never heard of him or perhaps even if they have rejected him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the idea there being the work of Jesus; the sacrifice of Jesus is enough for the whole world. It is enough for everybody. The question then becomes, but does that mean that everybody gets it? So, there is enough money in the bank for everybody, but does everybody make the withdrawal? If you are saved, you are going to be saved through Jesus. There is no generic, universal salvation that does not matter what you believed. There are some who would say: Well, just being a good Buddhist, just being a good Muslim is enough. You will be saved because you were good at your religion; and people like C. S. Lewis, even, speculated to say: No, I do not think that is right. If Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, then if anybody is saved, whether or not they ever heard of Jesus in this life; whether they were a Christian or adhered to another faith; if they, in the end get saved, it will be because they get caught up in the cleansing power of Jesus' blood, and that is the only way that they will then be saved.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is interesting that you mentioned C. S. Lewis, because he actually was an advocate for at least a form of inclusivism that maybe most people will be saved, or maybe a lot of people will be saved – surprisingly, because they were not Christians – he says this in different ways. C. S. Lewis, the great patron saint of evangelicals; the guy we often quote on this program.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very often.

DAVE BAST

He goes beyond clear New Testament teaching in speculating on this matter, and he has this thing in his last Narnia book, where this young Calormene soldier is saved in the end through Aslan, and he says, “I worship Tash. How can this be?” And Aslan says, “Well, whatever name you use, it was really me; because you were sincere.” That is an inclusivist take on the New Testament. I do not know how comfortable you are with that, or I do not know how comfortable I am with that idea. It is an appealing thought, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is; and our dearest hope as Christians should be that more will be saved and not fewer.

DAVE BAST

Yes, do you really want people to go to hell?

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is part of the appeal of inclusivism; however, as we are going to take up in our next segment, the fact of the matter is, we also cannot get around the many, many Biblical texts that seem to indicate that, although the work of Jesus is enough to save everybody, not everybody will be saved. There is that prospect of hell; there is that prospect of judgment; and we will wonder what some of those texts mean next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and in this program, Dave, we are wondering about that question, is everybody, at the end of the day, going to be saved through Jesus, or only some? We looked in the first segment at texts that seem very expansive – all things, all people, for the whole world – that Jesus died and there is enough for the whole world and all people will be saved. So, there are texts that if you just look at them only would make you say, “Oh, well, one way or the other, everybody is saved.” But they are not the only texts in the New Testament that talk about this.

DAVE BAST

That is very true, and we are going to turn now to some of the warnings that are clearly articulated that are addressed to us. The interesting thing is, most of the warnings in the New Testament about the possibility of being lost are directed to believing people; to religious people. There is very little said to people outside the family of God; you know, those people that we are always speculating about: What about all the people in China or what about all the Muslims? What about those who have never heard? The warnings really are not addressed primarily to those folks. As we listen to especially what Jesus says, he is constantly talking to people like scribes and Pharisees and very devout, very conservative, very religious folks.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nobody in the New Testament speaks about the warning of judgment, or even uses the various Greek words that we often translate *hell*, nobody does that more than Jesus. Let's just string together a few texts here. You can think about some of Jesus' parables. The great wedding feast, where people are invited and they do not come, and so they bring in others; but Jesus, at one point in the parable, says: None of those invited will taste my banquet. They are out.

There is the rich man in Lazarus' parable, where the rich man ignored Lazarus, the poor man; the rich man goes to hell; Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham, so there is a difference; all that outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

DAVE BAST

That he talks about, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was a kid I was always struck with that "gnashing of teeth" thing. It is Jesus who says that most of the time, right?

DAVE BAST

Jesus talked about a place where the worm never dies, gnawing – that infinite, everlasting remorse or pain – famously, at the end of his ministry, he strings together parables in Matthew 25, and the centerpiece of those is the sheep and the goats.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The great separation...

DAVE BAST

I will say to you, depart from me, I never knew you; a text that we looked at earlier in this series: Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will be saved. So, Jesus himself is the one who most frequently warns us; but there are also passages in the New Testament that speak of warnings for people who casually, carelessly practice sinful behavior with almost not giving it a thought. Paul says, for example, to the Galatians: I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God; after listing a whole series illustratively of sinful behavior.

Most of all, another passage from Galatians, from Chapter 6, where Paul says:

⁷Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. You will reap whatever you sow. You cannot fool with God; you cannot make light of God; you cannot make a joke out of this, as if life is not really serious; as if it is not possible to lose at this whole business of salvation, as well as to win.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what that speaks to – and we have talked about this before – that one thing we should never do as believers – and nobody would ever want to do this – if you just said this to somebody, they would say, "Well, of course, I would never do that." But maybe with just over-familiarity with the Gospel, we do it anyway. One thing we should never forget is how real and raw evil is. It is not something that God could just wink away. He could not just say: Oh, that's no big deal. Let's just ignore that and move on. No, there is

something all through the Bible, starting with the fall in Genesis 3, and extending all the way through the Bible that says, this is serious. Sin and evil must be judged. There is ultimately going to be a distinction; a separation; a difference to be observed here. What we end up doing, if we take away the prospect of judgment; if we take away the possibility of there being a real divide between those who are truly on the side of God and of his creation and of its flourishing and of its restoration, and those who oppose that – if we take away the possibility of that real divide, we actually wash some of the color out of salvation itself, because the grace of God shines the brightest and is the most awe-inspiring to us when we realize what it had to overcome, which was something very powerful, very real.

Dave Bast:

I think it is important to embrace both sides of this question; to take the warning seriously and the reality of judgment seriously; otherwise, as you say, we detract from the glory of God's salvation. If there is nothing to save us from; if there is no reality of hell that we are rescued from, what is the big deal? Also, to take some of these wonderful, universal passages that expand the scope – we do not want to be narrow or uncharitable – we do not want to usurp the place of God and think that we are sure who is in and who is out and it is just this little circular band that we are part of, and all those other people, ah, they are going to hell. That is no good either.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I used to say in my preaching, Dave, and you perhaps have done this, too, when I was a pastor, I used to say to people, “If you get to heaven someday, or when you get to heaven someday, when you get into the new creation, the kingdom of God, if there are a whole lot more people there than you thought during your life – if there are a few people there who you did not think were going to make it, maybe your enemies or something – you are not going to be disappointed, are you? You will not be disappointed if heaven is fuller than you ever thought it would be. I hope you will be joyful. I hope you will be joyful to see your enemy there. We should never wish people into hell. We need to take judgment seriously, but that wideness in God's mercy is something that tells us that there might be some surprises in store, but we had better not be disappointed by the surprises of grace. We should rejoice in them.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. There is a very personal and practical way to bring this all home and apply it to ourselves, and Jesus also, actually, very helpfully shows us what that is, which is where we will go next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are tackling, Dave, the very big question of is everyone saved or not? Is there going to be universal salvation through Jesus, or will there be a real hell that will have people in it for all eternity? Again, we have looked at the texts that seem to say Jesus died for the whole world, and through Christ all will be saved. There are those texts, and universalists, those who believe that everybody will be saved in the end; no one will go to hell; they seize on those texts, but we have also looked at the other texts, like this one, which we did not directly read, but from Matthew 10, where Jesus says:

³²Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. And so, that seems to point to the possibility of a real divide that could go on and on into eternity.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely, and this is a question about which we are really, strongly tempted to speculate. We love to indulge. This is one of those late night bull sessions in the dorm room, or this is a Sunday school class, where you start going back and forth, and we are always thinking about, them, them, them. What about them, God? What about those people? What about people who have not had a chance? What about people who have never heard? What about people who were so turned off by the Christians that they met that they simply could not accept their message? There is a great warning against speculating. There is a wonderful verse – the Reformers love this one; especially Calvin, loved Deuteronomy 29:29: The secret things belong to the

Lord, our God; but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

In other words, stick to what is clear and plain and do not worry about what about those people who have never heard, because the Bible does not really address that for them. That is not our story, that is their story, and God is really only going to deal with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We need to embrace a level of mystery, but there is also a long history against idle speculation. You know this story no doubt, Dave, too, and many of our listeners no doubt know this as well. I think it goes back to Augustine, although, many other people in history have grabbed it. There was somebody who once said to Augustine, wondering about the eternality of God, and the person said: Well, what was God doing in all of those eons and eons of eternity before he made this world? And Augustine said: He was creating hell for the curious. For those who spend their lives with idle questions and speculations. So, there is some danger in wondering about this in the abstract.

DAVE BAST

The other warning I think we might take to heart is the warning against simply embracing an idea because it is convenient or because it is wishful thinking; it is what we would like to believe; especially if it lets us off the hook. You know, it is one thing to wrestle with the passages of scripture that indicate the cosmic nature of Christ's salvation and his reconciling of all things; it is another thing to do so, so that we can conclude: Well, I do not have to actually go tell my neighbor or actually send missionaries or go myself as a missionary to the ends of the earth, because hey, they are all in anyway. No problem. I can live for myself. Or, what is perhaps even taking it a step further: I can eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we are all going to heaven anyway, no matter what we do; that irresponsible, it lets me off the hook attitude toward the question; that is another thing I think we want to say no to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think the other thing – maybe the other side of the coin – that we want to say no to is also being a little too simplistic about all of this; a little too flip about all of this; and saying more than we know on also the other side. One of the things that many of our listeners will know is the name of Rob Bell. He wrote a book a couple of years ago called *Love Wins*, which was very controversial because, although it is little hard to nail it down, it looked like, in this book, Rob Bell, a very influential evangelical pastor, was denying hell. But one of the things right at the beginning of the book that he said set him off was that in his church somebody had written a comment on a comment board that Gandhi went to hell. Gandhi was not a Christian, so Gandhi was in hell. That upset him, to say: How do you know that? Are you saying more than you know about that one particular individual? Sometimes people move from gleeful hellfire and brimstone pronouncements about this person or that person or that group; sometimes they move from that to saying: You know what? I do not want to have anything to do with that, so I am going to deny there is a hell. That is not the right thing to do, either; but on the other hand, making those pronouncements and claiming more than you know about any given individual or group, that is not the way to go, either. We need to speak carefully and soberly about these matters.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. It is necessary, if you are going to be a Biblically faithful Christian, and accept what scripture teaches pretty clearly, it is necessary to believe in hell; it is not necessary to speculate about its possible population; especially with respect to any individual. In fact, that is right out; that is absolutely forbidden. Here is where it comes down to for Jesus; and I love this little incident from Luke Chapter 13, because somebody comes up to Jesus and essentially asks him the question we have been wrestling with; how many people are going to be saved? Is it everybody? Is it not? This is how Jesus replied:

²³Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them – so, he not only replies to this person, but to the whole crowd there – ²⁴Make every effort to enter through the narrow door because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Who is the narrow door? He is speaking

about himself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Christ himself, yes.

DAVE BAST

What I love about this is, this person comes up wanting Jesus to indulge his curiosity – there we are again, the curious – and Jesus says to him: What about you? This guy says, “How many are going to be saved?” Who is in; who is out? Jesus says: What about you? Are you in or out? You are standing right in front of me; I am the door to salvation; you need to come in through me; I am the only way, as he will say famously in John: I am the way, the truth, and the life. Have you come in? Have you believed?

SCOTT HOEZEE

That reminds me at the very end of John, after Jesus has restored Peter, in John 21, there is also the line – okay, so Peter has been restored by Jesus, but then he looks over at, we think, John, and Peter says: Well, what about him? What about that one? And Jesus says: Do not worry about that. What is that to you? You just do what you have to do and proclaim the Gospel. I think that is the bottom line for all of us. If we know the Gospel; if we personally know the saving love of Jesus, we rejoice in that and we spend our whole lives witnessing to – not the bad news: You are going to hell – no, the good news: In Jesus there is the possibility of salvation for all.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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