

## Saving Faith (Romans 3vv27-31)

### Introduction :

There is a saying that goes ‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread’ – I feel very much the weight of that this morning.

Not least because we know the historical use of these verses during the Reformation. It was these verses, along with others that formed the heart of the Protestant/ Catholic polemic. A polemic that started in 1517 and finally led to the Thirty Years’ War between 1618-1648 – a war that saw a third of the population of Europe dead.

Now, certainly that war wasn’t only about theology – it was also about politics and power, the nation states of Europe trying to grab land from the dying empire – but theological differences were also a key part of the conflict. Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians committing genocide on each other over their understanding of how faith relates to salvation.

I don’t know how you react to that – but if it doesn’t make you want to fall on your face before God and cry out for his mercy, I don’t know what will.

We have had the amazing privilege of living at the time when this disagreement has finally been laid to rest. In 1999, after 30 years (another 30 year period!, this time not fighting but talking and sharing theological understandings), Lutheran and Catholic theologians were able to issue a statement known as the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”. In this document they stated,

*“The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics”<sup>1</sup>*

I don’t know how you respond to that? I can hardly read it without crying. That after 500 years, we can finally stop being enemies and learn again to be brothers.

Is it a coincidence that I get to preach on this passage here today? A Protestant Evangelical who has spent the last 12 years living in Catholic France, worshipping God each Sunday at the Catholic mass, encouraging evangelism and discipleship with a rural, Catholic parish? Is that an accident – or is God making a point?

This morning I propose to look at two questions, ‘What is saving faith?’ and ‘How do we access saving faith?’ None of the answers we will explore are dogmatic – these are merely my personal thoughts as I have tried to respond to this passage. As I said before we are approaching a mystery here, we can only do so respectfully and humbly.

God tells us Himself that we are not going to be able to understand how salvation works,

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 31/10/99 accessible online at [http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF\\_Documents/EN/JDDJ\\_99-jd97e.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/EN/JDDJ_99-jd97e.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>*Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call on him while he is near.*  
<sup>7</sup>*Let the wicked forsake their ways  
and the unrighteous their thoughts.  
Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*  
<sup>8</sup>*'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,'  
declares the Lord.*  
<sup>9</sup>*'As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.'*<sup>2</sup>

Note that this text is in the context of a passage about salvation – about God's grace reaching out to us as we turn towards Him in repentance. God tells us in advance, "You're not going to be able to understand this". But we don't believe Him! Let me remind you, right here that, at its heart, salvation remains a glorious mystery.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 55vv6-9, NIV

## 1 What is saving faith?:

First of all we can say what it is not. Saving faith is not merely mental assent or agreement with certain theological beliefs i.e. if you believe A + B + C then you are saved. If we want to know what saving faith is, perhaps our first stop should be Hebrews 11 – the heroes (and heroines) of faith chapter.

If you read through this list of Old Testament characters who are held up as examples of faith, it is very clear that there are probably not many theological beliefs that they all share. Certainly they all believed in God, certainly they all believed that the universe was created by God. But apart from those two core beliefs, it is hard to make any case for much more shared theology.

In fact we find a key for understanding what the writer of Hebrews thinks saving faith is in verse 6.

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.<sup>3</sup>*

So for the writer of Hebrews saving faith is a basic belief in the existence of a creator God, a God who desires a relationship with man and who responds benevolently to man's attempt to seek him. And a practical response to that belief – it is active belief, belief that does things. "By faith Abraham ..." These heroes and heroines of faith don't just have some intellectual beliefs in their heads; their beliefs change their lives.

If we make a comparison with the 'eternal gospel' spoken of in Revelation 14, we can add to this a belief that God is worthy of worship, that he will stand in judgement over mankind.

*Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'<sup>4</sup>*

Again, some basic beliefs about the existence of God, beliefs which lead people to lives of worship.

Now, none of these statements so far have mentioned anything about Christ. All the Hebrews heroes and heroines lived before the time of Christ; the eternal gospel in Revelation is talking about what is revealed to all mankind through the general revelation of the created universe. So, at its most basic, saving faith, at least in the Old Testament sense or a General Revelation sense (i.e. God's self-revelation through the creation, as opposed to Special Revelation which is God's self-revelation through Scripture and through the Incarnation), seems to be a simple belief in the existence of God – a God who stands above man and is deserving of worship and praise - and the desire to live in a creature-creator relationship with this God, a desire which is practically expressed in everyday life.

We find that Jesus expresses this same idea of salvation as being a relationship,

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11v6, NIV

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 14v6-7, NIV

<sup>5</sup> John 17v3, NIV

Saving faith is presented as a relationship - this time with both God the Father and God the Son. What we are starting to see here is that saving faith, in both the Old and the New Testaments is not simply mental assent to some key doctrinal statements, but rather a relationship of trust in God – a God who reveals himself progressively, firstly through His creation, then through His involvement with Israel, then most fully, through the incarnation of the Christ.

But what we are seeing that the key and unchanging element in saving faith is not the theological content of our beliefs, but rather the placing of our confidence and trust in God.

Let me give you a short phrase that summarizes everything I want to say this morning,

**Saving faith is not about what you know, it's about who you trust.**

Can you trust someone even if you don't know very much about them? If you have to go to hospital for an operation, how much do you know about the surgeon? Yet do you put your trust in him? With regard to salvation, how much do people need to know about God before they can trust Him? I leave you to think about that question and come to your own conclusions.

But it appears that the Bible is telling us, saving faith is all about who you trust. If I can anticipate next weeks' passage a little,

*However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.<sup>6</sup>*

So it appears that Saint Paul's radical message in this passage was to declare that the Jews' religious system had only been of benefit when it had brought them into a relationship of trust in God, but that God was able to work amongst the Gentiles to bring them into this same relationship without the Jewish religious system.

Now it is a really GOOD thing that saving faith is not based upon our knowledge of God. Why do I say that? Well I say that because of my own experience. Let me share with you my story.

I was raised in a church in the evangelical tradition – a church that was probably quite a lot like this one. We were serious Bible students, we preached systematically through the Bible, we did Bible study, we were a literate people who read a lot of Christian books. Growing up my whole life in that church I felt I had a pretty good grasp on theology. So when God called Sharon and I into full-time Christian ministry and we went to Moorlands to prepare for that, I didn't expect to learn much in the way of theology. I thought that I already had my 'theological ducks' lined up quite nicely – Boy did I get a surprise!

Within a matter of days, I became shockingly aware that not only were my 'theological ducks' not lined up, but most of them were missing! Suddenly I was shown vast areas of theology that I had never even known about! Worse still, Moorlands being a non-denominational college, I was in the same class as Anglicans, Methodists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Baptists and as I started to share with my fellow students and read theological books written by people from these different streams of Christianity, I quickly realised that there

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 4v5, NIV

were Christians who had very different theological beliefs to me – and yet their theology was based upon the Bible too!

So not only did I become aware of my vast ignorance of theology, I also discovered that most of what I thought I did know, needed to be re-evaluated!

At which point you either do one of three things – you have a nervous breakdown, or you put on blinkers and decide you're not going to look to the right or the left – your theology is fine and you're sticking with it, or – if you are like me - you think 'This is brilliant!' My God just got a whole lot bigger! This is awesome! And you start to get excited learning about the wider Christian perspectives on God and His world. Suddenly your vision of God is enlarged, He becomes more glorious, more awesome, you are led to a deep sense of worship of God in all His mystery. At least that's what happened to me, and today 14 years after leaving Moorlands I'm still loving the adventure!

So my 3 years' studying theology at Moorlands actually taught me one really important lesson – that I know nothing! Prior to Moorlands I thought I knew everything, after 3 years you realise that you've only scratched the surface of the immense amount of theological knowledge that exists. And that is perhaps the most valuable lesson that a university education can teach you. I've just finished 3 years studying for a Master's degree in missiology– so now I have an honours degree in engineering an honours degree in applied theology and a Master's degree in missiology - and I've never been more convinced of my complete ignorance of God! And that's a good thing!

There is another important thing to remember about theology – it is always wrong! Theology is what man thinks about God – a God who, as we have already seen from Isaiah 55, tells us He is above and beyond our human capacity to understand.

So the one thing we know for certain about our theology is that it always misses its target, sometimes more widely than others, but we always miss. God is above and beyond human capacity to explain Him accurately, our concepts are weak and paltry things that cannot do justice to the reality of God. Any theological argument is always about who is the least wrong! Our theology is therefore always provisional never definitive, it is a work in progress –we need to be humble about our theology.

So it is a good thing that our salvation is not based upon our knowledge of God, because, as my own experience shows, our knowledge is never complete, neither is it ever completely accurate. So, if salvation was based upon what we know – which ones of us would be saved? Who of us has a theology knowledge that is sufficiently correct, sufficiently comprehensive, and at what point in our spiritual pilgrimage do we reach this point?

Now I'm not saying theology is not important – I've spent the last 17 years of my life studying theology particularly in relation to differences between Catholics and Evangelicals and it has been an amazing and faith-building experience and I am loving it! But it is always provisional and incomplete.

## 2 How do we access saving faith?:

As we start to think about our second question, we become aware of another very positive aspect of the fact that our salvation is not based upon our theological knowledge. As salvation is not dependent upon theological understanding it is equally accessible to all people, everywhere. If this were not the case, then some people would be advantaged and some disadvantaged, either due to their intellectual capacity – clever people would have easier access than less bright people; or their cultural context would make salvation more or less accessible. But if salvation is merely a faith response to God’s revelation to a man or to a woman that He exists and that He calls them into relationship with Him – then anyone can be saved, anywhere, anytime.

We have seen earlier that Saint Paul declared to the Jews that they had been brought to saving faith – into this relationship of trust in God - through the system of religious Law which God had given them through Moses. But that God had brought Gentiles into this same relationship with God by different means.

Jesus Himself has confirmed to us that eternal life is nothing else that this relationship with God the Father and God the Son.

So how exactly do we come into this kind of a relationship with God?

Now there are some key New Testament verses which we need to consider when we are trying to discover how we access saving faith, as good Evangelicals you probably can recite them by heart,

*if you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>7</sup>*

What does this tell us about saving faith? It seems to tell us that in order to be saved we need to hold some specific beliefs about the divinity of Jesus and the centrality of his death and resurrection for our salvation. Let’s look at another verse.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.<sup>8</sup>*

Again, it seems that we have here a requirement that we should hold certain specific beliefs about in Jesus as the source of salvation in order to be saved.

Let us look at another key verse,

*Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me.’<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 10v9, NIV

<sup>8</sup> John 3vv16-17, NIV

<sup>9</sup> John 14vv6-7, NIV

Again, it seems that some specific beliefs are necessary about Jesus as the only way in which salvation is made accessible to man, in order that we might be saved.

The more astute, (or awake!), amongst you will now be saying, “Wait a minute Stephen! You just said that salvation is not based upon theological knowledge. Now you’re quoting scriptures that tell us that salvation is only possible if we know and believe some key doctrines concerning Jesus and his death and resurrection! What are you playing at?!”

It’s a tricky one isn’t it?! On the one hand, we have some Old Testament verses, the Hebrews heroes of faith passage and the eternal gospel of Revelation, all telling us that saving faith is merely a response of trust to a revelation that the creator God exists and reaches out to us.

We can also look at St Peter’s words to Cornelius;

<sup>34</sup> ... ‘I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism  
<sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.<sup>10</sup>

Even St Paul seemed to hint at the possibility of this kind of salvation in his message to the Athenians,

<sup>22</sup> Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

<sup>24</sup> ‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.<sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.<sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> “For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.”

<sup>29</sup> ‘Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill. <sup>30</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.’<sup>11</sup>

So even St Paul seems to allow at least the possibility of salvation outside of specific knowledge of Christ. Yet on the other hand, we have these other New Testament verses, we have just seen, which seem to tell us that certain specific beliefs about the person and work of Jesus are necessary for salvation. How do we reconcile these conflicting ideas? This is not just a trivial academic conundrum – the eternal destiny of the majority of humankind rests upon our answer.

Again, I state that what I’m sharing with you today are my ideas and my attempts to come to terms with this mystery.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 10v34-35, NIV

<sup>11</sup> Acts 17vv22-31, NIV

The first thing we note is that salvation is only possible because of Jesus. That goes for Old Testament faith as well as for New Testament faith. If any people are saved at all, it is solely through the person and work of Christ. Old Testament faith looked forward to Christ, New Testament faith looks back to Christ. It is always Christ who saves.

Secondly, I think we need to think about the difference between normative and exclusive. The normative way that I go to get to my bedroom at night is by using the stairs. However, it is not the exclusive way. I could go outside, get a ladder, climb up and go through the bedroom window. No doubt it would get the neighbours talking, but it is possible. The normative way for me to go to bed is by using the stairs, but it is not the exclusive way.

When we consider the New Testament and their statements about specific beliefs about Christ that are necessary for salvation we need to remember that these statements were written to Christian communities who had already received the gospel, who already knew about Jesus. Therefore the apostles were writing to them to explain, this is how you were saved. This is the normative way of salvation – people hear the gospel of Jesus, they respond in faith and they come into a saving relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But does this mean that it is the exclusive way of salvation? Is it possible that an Old Testament access to salvation might still be possible for those who haven't heard about Jesus? In effect the question we are asking is;

**Does the Christ-event make salvation less accessible than it was before?  
Are the gates of mercy narrowed by the coming of the Christ?**

Does Jesus' coming mean that it is no longer possible to be saved simply through a relationship of trust in the Creator God without a specific theological knowledge about Jesus and His saving death?

Again, Christians will have different opinions about this and I'm making no dogmatic statements – you can explore this together with your leaders in your House Groups this week.

However, the further I go on in the Christian faith, the more hopeful I'm becoming about the wideness of the mercy of God. I've spent the last 12 years studying Jonah – that it's taken me 12 years to study a book with only 689 words, tells you all you need to know about, either my stupidity or my laziness!

But if my 12 years have taught me anything it is that the grace of God is a wild and an amazing thing. I've just finished writing a book which is the fruit of these twelve years, a 40 day meditational commentary called "Jonah – The Epistle of Wild Grace". The key message of which, is that in the most unlikely of places, in the most improbable of circumstances, amongst the least deserving of people, the grace of God just bursts forth in salvation.

And, surprisingly, it is God's own people who have the biggest problem with this. God's grace offends our nicely constructed theologies, it ruins our nicely formulated understandings of how God should act, it breaks right open the little box we have created to put God in. The message of Jonah is that God's grace is a wild, untameable force and you had better learn to live with it.

## Conclusions:

To sum up, we can say that;

- Saint Paul teaches us that what saves us is a relationship of trust in God;
- That this saving relationship is only accessible because of the person and work of Christ;
- That for us living in the gospel epoch, this is normally accessed through a specific response to the gospel of Jesus;
- That there is the strong hope, that there may be other means whereby the salvation Jesus makes possible is accessible to those who haven't heard about Him, or understood the gospel message – but who have responded in faith to a sense of the Creator's presence and have reached out to Him and sought to live lives pleasing to Him.

I hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend your House Groups this week and share your thoughts about this profound mystery. You will read together the story of Ahatsistcari, the Huron warrior chief and his conversion in 1642 – if that story doesn't fill you with joy and hope about the accessibility of salvation I don't know what will!

Perhaps the best way to conclude today is to quote Saint Augustine, who summed up in a single phrase everything I've tried to say today,

*We come to God by love and not by navigation.*

Salvation is not a matter of following a recipe, or a map, or instructions – it is simply a response of love to the God who reaches out to us. This response of love is a mystery and a miracle.

God somehow reaches out to us and draws forth a response of love from our hearts. How He does this is a mystery we shall never understand. No wonder heaven erupts in praise and celebration when someone is saved!

If we have had this experience we are miraculous people! We need to thank God for His mercy and grace – celebrate it and pray that others might experience this same miracle.

## Small Group Discussion

In my Masters' degree I studied the 'Jesuit Relations' – the annual reports made by the Jesuit missionaries in Canada between 1610 and 1791.

In the volume for 1642/3 they recount the following conversion story about Ahatsistcari, the greatest Huron war chief. Please read this together;

*The man of greatest importance among those whom we have solemnly Baptized in this House, has been one Ahatsistcari of the village of St. Joseph. His courage and his Yearly exploits against the Enemies cause him to be looked upon as the chief Warrior in the Country. It is not yet a year since, having encountered three hundred Iroquois, he put them all to flight, and made some of them prisoners, although on his side there were but fifty, of whom he was the Chief. And during the previous Summer, while crossing a great lake which separates the Hurons from their Enemies, having perceived a number of large Canoes filled with Iroquois who were coming to attack him, his companions thought of nothing but flight, but he said : " No, no, my Comrades. Let us attack them ourselves." As they approached each other, he jumped, alone and quite naked, into a large Canoe full of Foes, split open the head of the first one that he met, threw two others into the water, into which he himself leaped, upsetting at the same time the Canoe and all who were in it. Then swimming with one hand, he killed and massacred with the other all who came near him. So unexpected a sight filled the other Canoes of the Enemy with fear; and, they, finding themselves vanquished by their own conquest, even before they had fought, took to flight from fear of such Courage. But he, having regained his own Canoe, pursued those who remained in the water, and brought them back in triumph to his Country. In a word, this Man's life is but a series of combats, and from his childhood his thoughts have been only of war ; and it was through this that God made him a Christian.*

*He never manifested any aversion to our Faith, and asked us for Baptism more than three years ago ; but, as he could not make up his mind to abandon some Superstitious practices that are customary among the Infidels, we could not grant it to him.. At last, the Fathers who have had charge of the Mission of saint Joseph gave him the final instructions last Winter, and, as they were satisfied with him, he came at Easter to plead his own case. " I have Faith in the depth of my heart," he said, " and my actions have sufficiently shown it throughout the Winter. In two days I shall leave for the war ; if I am killed in battle, tell me, where will my Soul go if you refuse me Baptism? If you saw into my heart as clearly as the Great Master of our lives, I would already be numbered among the Christians ; and the fear of the flames of Hell would not accompany me, now that I am about to face Death. I cannot Baptize myself; all that I can do is to declare sincerely the desire that I have for it. After that, if my Soul be burned in Hell, you will be the cause of it.*

*But, whatever you may do, I will always pray to God, because I know him ; and perhaps he will have mercy on me, for you say that he is better than you." " But," said one of our Fathers, " what made you first think of believing?" "Even before you came to this Country," he replied, "I had escaped from a great many perils in which my Companions perished. I saw very well that it was not I who extricated myself from these dangers. I had this thought, that some more powerful Spirit, who was unknown to me, gave me favorable aid" (although the Hurons attribute to dreams the source of all their good fortune) ; " I was convinced that all that was only nonsense, but I knew no more about it. When I heard of the Greatness of God, whom you preach, and of what Jesus Christ had done when he was on Earth, I recognized him as the being who had preserved me, and I resolved to honor him all my life. When I went to war, I recommended myself to him night and*

morning. It is to him that all my victories are due ; he it is in whom I believe : and I ask you for Baptism, so that he may have pity on me after my death."

Was it possible to refuse such a Man ? We Baptized him publicly, with some others, on Holy Saturday, and gave him the name of Eustache.

When he had performed his Devotions on Easter Sunday, he started for the War with some of our best Christians, who had remained solely for the purpose of celebrating that holy Day, although the Troops whom they were to join had already departed. But, before separating, finding that a considerable number of persons were assembled there belonging to various Nations, they wished of their own accord to hold a Council. Here, in a few words, are the resolutions that they took : ' Let us hereafter be but one body and one mind, since we all serve the same Master. Whenever any one of us passes by a Village wherein a Christian dwells, let him not lodge elsewhere. Whenever any one is afflicted, let him seek consolation among the others. Let us not reveal one another's faults to the Infidels; but let it be recognized, through the friendship that we shall have for one another, that the Name of Christian is a tie more binding than Nature's bonds.

" Let us inform our Relatives who are not of the same Faith as we, even if they be our fathers and our children, that we do not wish our bones to be mingled together after our death, since our Souls will be eternally separated, and our affection will not continue beyond this life."<sup>12</sup>

## Questions:

1. When was Ahatsistcari saved?
2. When did he become a Christian?
3. What are the implications of the answer you give to this question – for your church's evangelism, for mission to unreached people groups?
4. What do you think of the response to the gospel made by the newly converted Indians?

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<sup>12</sup> Thwaites R.G. (ed.) *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents - Travels and Explorations Of The Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, Vol. XXIII 1642-1643, CLEVELAND: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1818, p25ff accessible online at <http://archive.org/download/jesuits23jesuoft/jesuits23jesuoft.pdf>

The following hymn was written by Frederick Faber – an Anglican priest who converted to Catholicism – please read it carefully together.

## **There is a Wideness in God's Mercy**

*Words: Frederick W. Faber, Oratory Hymns, 1854.*

*Music: Wellesley, Lizzie Tourjée, 1878*

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in Heaven;  
There is no place where earth's failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.

There is welcome for the sinner,  
And more graces for the good;  
There is mercy with the Saviour;  
There is healing in His blood.  
There is grace enough for thousands  
Of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations  
In that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of our mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.  
There is plentiful redemption  
In the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.  
'Tis not all we owe to Jesus;  
It is something more than all;  
Greater good because of evil,  
Larger mercy through the fall.  
If our love were but more simple,  
We should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

Souls of men! why will ye scatter  
 Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
 Foolish hearts! why will ye wander  
 From a love so true and deep?  
 It is God: His love looks mighty,  
 But is mightier than it seems;  
 'Tis our Father: and His fondness  
 Goes far out beyond our dreams.

But we make His love too narrow  
 By false limits of our own;  
 And we magnify His strictness  
 With a zeal He will not own.  
 Was there ever kinder shepherd  
 Half so gentle, half so sweet,  
 As the Saviour who would have us  
 Come and gather at His feet?

### Questions:

1. How do you respond to this hymn?
2. What verses/phrases speak to you most?
3. Does your understanding of the gospel match that of this hymn?
4. What criticisms does the last verse make? Are these valid in your experience?

### For Further Study:

There are some books that have greatly helped me as I have sought to think about this subject, I recommend them to you.

#### **Eternity in Their Hearts – Don Richardson, Regal, 1981.**

In this book the anthropologist and missionary, Don Richardson, presents 25 examples of unreached peoples who had already received some revelation about the one great God prior to the missionaries arrival. This knowledge often prepared them to recognise the truth of the Christian gospel and to receive it.

#### **Who Then Can be Saved? – Terrance L. Tiessen, IVP, 2004.**

In this book an evangelical, reformed scholar looks at the question of the accessibility of salvation outside of a specific knowledge of Christ. While I feel Tiessen's ultimate conclusions are too conservative (I would be more hopeful than he is), I think he does a brilliant job of considering all the key data and evaluating the different possibilities.