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Could God Reach a Second-Century Shinto Monk Who Desired Redemption?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether God could reach a second-century Shinto monk who desired redemption and whether it's possible for someone to put their faith in Jesus for salvation but not have eternal life because they weren't chosen.

* Could God reach a second-century Shinto monk who was dissatisfied with his religion and desired redemption?

* Is it possible for someone to put their faith in Jesus for salvation and do their best to live a Christian life but not have eternal life because they weren't chosen?

Transcript

(upbeat music) (dinging) - I'm Amy Hall, and you're listening to Stand to Reasons, #SCRSQPodcast. With me today, as usual, is Greg Cokol. - Hi, Amy.

- Hi, Greg. All right, let's start with a question from Corey Chia. - Corey.

- Corey Chia. - Okay. - I'm researching Japanese history and came across an obscure second century text where Shinto Monk was expressing his dissatisfaction with the religion and how it didn't meet his desire for redemption.

Is this someone for whom there was no hope? Could God reach him? - Well, the simple answer to that is yes, God can reach him. And in fact, a number of years ago, I read a book called the C. Don Richardson Peace Child. And that's the first book.

Actually, that's something what I, his second one was eternity in their hearts. And what he described there is all these examples of people who were in the circumstance that was just described, a person seeking God in a sense on God's terms, not on his terms, seeking redemption. And God provided the particular information that was necessary for their redemption, which is the gospel.

There is a uniform voice in the New Testament that trusting in Christ is required for salvation. Now, I know this, there's a lot of Christians who don't believe this. And even people like Bill Craig seems to be equivocal on whether that's a requirement, or there are some other means for some of those that are outside the reception of the gospel proper for being justified, just like Old Testament believers who are justified without knowledge of Christ.

But that particular detail seems to have changed in the New Testament. And I point out in Acts chapter, I've done some writing about this on our website is one way the only way or... - No other name. - No other name.

These are two pieces that are similar that cover the same ground. And they've, so they're on our website, they've come by, go by different names. I don't know what the most current iteration is.

But I look at, for example, Acts chapter 10 in Cornelius. And here's a guy that's got incredible spiritual credentials. You know, he gives alms on a regular basis.

He worships the God of the Hebrews. He's a God-fearer. He's a Gentile, but he's doing all of these things.

The best that he can't give the information he has. And he's even receiving visions from God that are meant to connect him with Peter. Okay, but the problem is, why does he need to hear from Peter because the guy in spite of this great spiritual pedigree that Luke records there in Acts, he's not saved to use our language about the circumstance.

He's not saved. He's on his way. And so then God arranges supernaturally for both to have revelation about a meeting and Acts 10 records the meeting.

And Peter essentially preaches the truth about Jesus. And in the midst of that preachment, Cornelius and his family and friends that are gathered there become believers and there's a manifestations of the spirit. And so then they said, hey, they've got the spirit like we have, let's baptize them.

Now, the point here is, this is the inclusivist's poster boy. An inclusivist is someone who believes that a person can be saved by Christ apart from faith in Christ. In other words, they don't have to believe in Jesus.

And this is particularly in the New Testament era. Yet here's the poster boy and he's still not saved. And every indication in the New Testament is trust in Christ explicitly as required.

What must I do to be saved? Philippians, Taylor, Acts 16, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. There's not the slightest hint that people following other religious enterprises will be saved by Christ through the false religious enterprise. But that's the

inclusivist's claim.

And that's also, for example, the Roman Catholic Church's view at the moment. So on that view, this person who's doing his best to seek God, apparently according to this document, seeking redemption will receive redemption simply in virtue of seeking it apparently honestly, regardless of what religious view he happens to take at the time. But that's not what the New Testament says.

And the documentation from Richardson is that there's lots of examples of people in extreme circumstances like that in modern times. And we can record them and he does. He gives the history of them.

That God who in my view has already been working in their heart to draw him them to himself, which I think even our minions would agree on, is going to give whatever information is necessary to satisfy the demands of the gospel, faith in Christ. Since that's what the New Testament requires, why wouldn't God provide that for whoever is genuinely seeking him on his terms? Regardless of one's convictions about sovereign grace, of course God is capable and will do so when the circumstances require it. And that's my confidence.

So if we just play out this account of this Japanese person seeking redemption, then if they were seeking the true God on God's terms, then God is going to respond with what is necessary for them to be saved. If this is second century AD, then common era, then that information is going to be the gospel because that is what is clearly specified in the New Testament. And even according to Karl Rauner, the Roman Catholic theologian who holds to inclusivism and the idea of what some might call unconscious Christians, they're really Christian, but they don't realize it.

This notion of unconscious Christians or inclusivism was totally absent from church history until the end of the first or beginning of the second millennium. How could the church miss this for a thousand years if this is sound theology? It's not sound theology. So whoever is seeking God in the appropriate way is going to be found by him.

Okay, or is going to find him or vice versa, you know, because God is sovereign over that circumstance and there's nothing that is preventing him from getting the information to them that they need. He can move mountains and in fact, as the Richardson accounts there in eternity in their hearts are evidence of that. So every confidence God would do that.

- And I would say it's even more certain than that because if someone is seeking God, that means God is drawing him and if God is drawing him and calling him, God will give him the gospel in whatever way. So when you're looking at someone in this second century text, we know that if God was truly drawing him and to himself, God would reveal himself to him. But you can have someone who desires redemption but doesn't

desire God.

He might want relief from his guilt. He might want to go to a place where everything will be redeemed. But that doesn't mean that he actually wants God because that involves some other things.

It involves submission, it involves kind of a giving over of yourself. It involves seeing God as he is. So even if somebody is lamenting the fact that he has sin or he has guilt and he doesn't like that, that doesn't mean he would turn to God.

And I think most of us probably know somebody who would fall under that category. - Yeah, a deeply religious person following their religion with figure. And I mean, many religious people qualify for that.

Look at all the Mormons, for example. Look at all the devout Jews. Look at all the devout, whatever Hindus, whatever.

They are obviously sincerely pursuing. Paul says in Romans chapter 10, regarding the Jews, I bear with them, witness, they have a zeal for God. They have a zeal for God.

But it's not in accordance with knowledge and not seeking God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own. They did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God, which is Christ. So you can read that, Romans 10, the first couple verses.

And that I think it helps tell the story that there are people, like just like you're saying, people who genuinely seek, but some other things are going on. And we don't know their heart, God does. And so I'm gonna leave that to God to sort that out.

I don't have to sort that out. But what we can't do is we can't change the standards that scripture clearly make for salvation just because it seems to us to be unfair. - Well, and underneath this is the idea that we are all by nature children of God's wrath.

So we look at someone like that and we think, oh, here's someone who deserves God's redemption. Again, we're looking at this from our own human perspective where we are all starting off in rebellion against God and we're comparing ourselves to other people, we're not seeing ourselves as we really are. We're starting off as people who are in rebellion against God who deserve punishment.

The fact that God saves anyone is just grace. And this is something, if I could just get people to understand what that means, because I think we're still, especially in this culture, we're still thinking that we are owed something by God. And so when you apply that to this case, no matter what God does, if he does not save this person, that's not an injustice.

So we cannot forget that as we're looking at this. And I would also say, even in the Old

Testament, only those who were trusting in the true God, who had faith in the true God as Abraham did, were the ones who were saved. And that's the same thing that goes through to the New Testament, although now we have more knowledge about God, so if we reject Jesus, we're rejecting the Father.

But even back then, it wasn't just that God didn't have the requirements of who to trust or how he was saving. - Or what the true religion is. See, there was no inclusivism in the Old Testament.

All of those pagan, people who followed pagan religions were condemned. And the Jews, when they followed the habits of the pagan religions, they were condemned to, even though they have the true God as the center of their religious, their formal religion. Obviously, they didn't follow him consistently, but it's not any different in the Old Testament.

I, when someone once said so, it's easier in the Old Testament to be saved, because you could believe whatever in as long as you're sincere. This is the way they understood it. And the answer is no, it was the people who were, as you pointed out, who were righteous in their pursuit of God and their behavior from human standards reflected that.

These were justified by their faith in God, just like Abraham and those that follow him, Paul makes that point that justification goes all the way back to Abraham, justification by faith. And all of those people, every one of Old Testament saints, had they been in the New Testament era, would have trusted Christ. - So then the question becomes, why did God do it this way? Because I think that's where people go next.

Why did God have people have faith in him to be saved? - Well, first of all, that's the only way it can happen. And this is the point that he makes in Romans 4, that the reason why it's by a promise and by grace is so that it can be guaranteed, because trying to do it by works will never work because we're fallen. So this is the reason.

Now, if God is creating the world in order to reveal himself and glorify himself and so that we can enjoy him forever, of course he's gonna save people through true knowledge about him and about Jesus. Because that's the whole point of the whole creation. Why would he save through some other religion and give glory to some other false God that's not the true and good God? That would be an injustice.

So this all comes down. There are so many things involved with this question. And a lot of our questions touch on a lot of these different things.

So I think these are things people need to think about. - It shows the importance of having some depth of knowledge in what might be called biblical anthropology. That is, what does the Bible teach about man and his condition? Both made the image of God and fallen and redeemed.

I mean, these are just three different glances if you wanna get the full picture. And if you don't have a clear understanding of made the image of God beautiful and fallen broken and what that brokenness entails, well, then you're not going to get your soteriology right, biblical soteriology, which is your doctrine of salvation. And because there's a shallow understanding of these things, there is a misunderstanding of the things that the doctrines that rest on a clear understanding of theology proper, the character of God and anthropology, the nature of man, for example.

- So here is a question that kind of hits this from another direction. This one comes from Michael. Is it possible for someone to put their faith in Jesus for salvation and do their best to live a Christian life, but not have eternal life because they were not chosen? And then he gives a few verses Ephesians 1, 4, John 6, 44, and Romans 8, 30.

- Well, okay, I'd have to look at those Ephesians. Let me just go to Ephesians 1, 4, John 6, 44 is the middle of the bread of life discourse. But the way Ephesians 1, 4, it says, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him.

Okay, so that's a verse that just makes reference to chosenness. And the answer to that question is very simply no. And the reason I say no, remember the way the word, the question is worded, is it possible for someone to have faith in Christ but not be chosen? And that completely misunderstands the notion of chosenness.

Now, we've talked about this a number of times recently, but I'm going to go back to the book of Romans and just read a verse that would be important for people to meditate on because it goes directly to this issue, all right? And in Romans, it says that, and to give you the whole passage, this is one that's oft quoted because it's an encouraging passage, but it's often misquoted. So I'm just going to give it to you straight. And we know, that's a good point there, we know, we have confident knowledge that God causes, in other words, he is the one who is responsible, all things to work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

Okay, well, where is it? What is that group? Those who love God are called according to his purpose. All right, next line. For those whom he foreknew and foreknowledge here is not omniscience because he's not foreknowing events, he's foreknowing people, okay? Those whom he foreknew, we'll call that election.

Now, listen to the secrets. He also predestined to become conformed to the image of his son. So there's the beginning, he foreknows, chosen, and here's the ending to be conformed to the image of his son.

All right, how's that accomplished? For those whom he predestined, now he goes through the details, those whom he predestined, he called. And those whom he called, he justified. How do you get justified? You get justified by faith in Christ.

The room who does not work but believes in the God or justifies the unrighteous to him is reckoned as righteousness. Or the ungodly, Tim is Russia is reckoned that's Romans four, okay? So do you see in this sequence, those whom he called, he justified, he justifies in virtue of faith. That's the question.

Who, a person who has faith in Jesus is the question. That's what Michael has asked. Well, if a person has faith in Jesus, it's because God foreknew him and guaranteed he would be made like Jesus and he guaranteed that by calling him, justifying him and those whom he justified, he also glorified.

That's resurrection. And that's the final end of being like Christ. It's all packaged in there.

So it's like, how can God, can God justify somebody that he didn't elect? No, can he elect somebody didn't choose? No, it's all part of the same package. If you are a Christian, it is in virtue of being part of this sequence. And in fact, if you're a Christian, every part of this sequence applies to you.

And this is not to me in the slightest bit ambiguous what God is saying here. And the only ambiguity is the tendency of people to take the English word foreknew to be omniscience. Oh, he knew, we were going to believe in him and therefore he chose us.

Well, that doesn't make any sense. He chose us because he knew we were gonna choose him. Well, if we choose him, then he doesn't need to choose us 'cause we chose him.

But why does it say he chose us? He doesn't choose us because we choose him. We choose him to be justified because he's already chose us. Foreknowledge is a synonym for predestination or for election.

Predestination is what ends up happening to us as a result of that election. And we are predestined that is determined beforehand to what become like Jesus, to be glorified. And there's the sequence.

So I understand the question, but it doesn't take into consideration the whole teaching. And it's often people say, well, if I wanted, I could want Jesus and believe it is and everything, but if I'm not chosen, then I'm out. Well, you'd only want to believe in all that if God was working in a sovereign way to bring you to that understanding.

People who are not chosen don't want that. Oh, they may want redemption like we talked about earlier, but not on God's terms. So I'd encourage Michael to look closely at this passage in Romans eight.

And I don't look at the John six passage, but I know the passage is about God's sovereign grace. Right. So I want to read that verse because Michael also has John 6:44, and that reads like this, no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up on the last day.

I will. Right. I will.

And it doesn't go further. And he says that all the father gives for me, I lose nothing. I think that's a phrase in that passage as well.

So there is no thing where the people have faith and they get lost because they're not chosen. Right. So this very verse is saying, if you have faith in Christ, God has drawn you.

So there's no question of whether or not there's no category where God draws you and then you're not chosen. That's just not, that's not how this works. And I think a lot of people do worry about this.

I get questions about this where they see this idea of chosen and then they are afraid that they aren't chosen. But this is what we need to keep in mind. You don't need to know why you have faith.

You can even disagree with us on why you have faith. But the fact is Jesus says he will not turn you away. He will not cast you out.

And I can't remember which verse that is now. And I wish I had that in front of me right now, but whoever comes to him, he will not turn aside. So if you have faith in him, first of all, it can't be that you're not chosen, but even if you have that worry, just hang on to the fact that you know, Jesus will not turn you away.

And that's the important thing to remember here. There's nothing, there's no barrier that will stop you from being saved. If you have faith in Christ, because it is faith in Christ that saves you by God's grace.

- Well, here in Matthew, or rather John chapter 10, says, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, "and they follow me." Notice the sequence here. They hear those are the ones he knows. They respond by following, "And I give eternal life to them." Notice the sequence.

So hearing his voice is responding in a way that results in salvation, according to Jesus. And they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. And the John six passage that we're just reading.

- So I did find that verse I was looking for. It's verse 37 in John six, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, "and the one who comes to me, I will certainly not cast out." - I was right on that verse. - This is going, so that's okay.

You said it so sweetly. "For I have come down from heaven, continuing here, "not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." And this is the will of him who sent me, "That all that he has given me, I lose nothing, "but raise it up in the last day." Okay, "For

this the will of my Father, "that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him, "will have eternal life, and I myself, "will raise him up on the last day." So top to bottom, there's 37 through 40. You have all kinds of citations of security because we have been chosen by the Father who draws us and gives us to Christ and that guarantees that we will be raised up in the last day.

- All right, that's all we have time for, Greg. Thank you, Michael, and thank you, Corey. We appreciate hearing from you.

If you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk or you can go through our website on our podcast page. Just look for the hashtag #STRAskPodcast page. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocco for Stand to Reason.

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