

**“We Belong to God”**

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I would like to begin by going through the questions that I asked you to take in your test. So I'm going to go through those now and find out how you guys scored. Now, in number 1 on your quiz it said:

1. In all low-income countries across the world today, how many girls finish primary school?
  - a. 20%
  - b. 40%
  - c. 60% (Right answer)
2. Where does the majority of the world's population live?
  - a. Low-income countries
  - b. Middle-income countries (Right answer)
  - c. High-income countries
3. In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has...
  - a. Almost doubled
  - b. Remained more or less the same
  - c. Almost halved (Right answer)
4. What is the life expectancy in the world today?
  - a. 50 years
  - b. 60 years
  - c. 70 years (Right answer) – Across the whole world.
5. There are 2 billion children in the world today aged 0-15 years old. How many children will there be in the year 2100, according to the United Nations?
  - a. 4 billion
  - b. 3 billion
  - c. 2 billion (Right answer) – The same amount as there are today.
6. The UN predicts that by 2100 the world's population will have increased by another 4 billion people. What is the main reason?
  - a. There will be more children (age below 15)
  - b. There will be more adults (ages 15-74) (Right answer) – Not children or elderly.
  - c. There will be more very old people (ages 75 and older)
7. How did the number of deaths per year from natural disasters change over the last hundred years?
  - a. More than doubled
  - b. Remained about the same
  - c. Decreased to less than half (Right answer)
8. How many of the world's 1-year-old children today have been vaccinated against some disease?
  - a. 20%

- b. 50%
- c. 80% (Right answer) – Across the whole world.

Now, these answers may surprise some of you. The average that people get right in the United States is about two or three out of 12, which means if you got more than two [right] you are pretty smart.

In fact, those people who have taken this test average two or three [correct], but when they allowed a troop of chimpanzees to take the test [laughter] they scored four [right] [laughter], because they randomly put their fingers on different answers, and the random score was higher than what everybody else scored in the United States.

In fact, the smarter you are the worse you scored. If you had a doctorate, or if you were a scientist, or had a master's degree in engineering, you scored lower than those people with only a high-school education; because we have come to believe that the world is in such a mess, that there is absolutely no hope, and that would have been a really good sermon, but its Thanksgiving week, so I needed to give you a better sermon than that [laughter] - give you some thankfulness today.

So, I wanted to go through these results and help explain what in the world is going on. So, I would like to begin. If you have a GPS and you know that it is taking you down streets that are wrong, and it is acting like you are driving through Des Moines, but it is actually showing Chicago and it is taking you to all of these wrong places, you know you are never going to get where you want to go. But, if you also are looking at information that is incorrect, you are not going to get where you want to be either.

My concern, and a lot of people's concern, is that their scores were probably similar to yours. You got two or three right and five wrong or six wrong, because over time we have gotten so much better but, especially the more-educated, especially those who paid attention in school, and those of us who are older, remember when it was really bad and we didn't get updated on how much better things have gotten.

Also, we think the world is bad, because we - as human beings - gravitate to drama. The media knows that. That is why they give us all of these things that are horrific. They don't tell us about the good things, because we will pay attention, and we won't turn the channel when we are addicted to negative and dramatic responses. That is not bad of them, it is not even fake news, everything they are showing us is better, or is not untruthful. They are just showing us the negative so many times, that we begin to believe that it is actually that bad.

So, I want to go through some of the results and explain why things are the way they are.

We are all human beings. Until 200 years ago, every single person in this world was a part of the first level of extreme poverty. In fact, science today has broken it into four categories: extreme poverty; level two is surviving, but not really good; number three, you have most of what you need, but not everything; and, level four (which is where we are) is where you have everything you need to enjoy your lives.

So, for example, level one: Almost all children born with any health problem at all die. Now, that is the reason, in level one, why people have eight children, because they are

hoping that out of those eight, two will live into adulthood. That is why they are cranking out so many children.

In level two, they lose less than half of their children. They may have to go walk a shorter distance to get water. They don't have medical care, but they have enough to eat and that makes them far better than level one, where there is not enough to eat, where fresh water is so far away, or nonexistent, and there is never an opportunity for medical care.

By level three, you have water that is probably out of your own tap - some of it is reasonably healthy. You may have to drink bottled water sometimes, but most of the time it is good. You have sewage that is not running open through the street. You have enough food to eat. Your medical care is iffy. You may get a little help with things, but you don't get the real help for surgeries and other things. Preventative care - you don't have in level three.

By level four, you have all of that and more. The interesting thing is that, before 200 years ago, everyone that lived in the world lived in level one. Two hundred years ago, 15 percent of people got to level two - but everyone else was level one. It wasn't until 1966 - that was the bench mark year - before 1966, most of the world, 59 or 60 percent, was level one, trying to get to level two; the rest were level two or three, and there were very few if any people at level four - mainly because of technology and the lack of medical help, other than the United States and some of northern Europe.

Now, today, shockingly when they did test, they found out that most people in the United States believed that about 50-59 percent of the world lived in poverty. That's not true. Twenty years ago, in 1996 (that is what the book said that I was pulling from, mainly), in 1996, 29 percent of the world lived in poverty. Twenty-nine percent. That is a lot better than 1966, where it was 59 percent. Today, in 2018, less than nine percent live in poverty.

Think about that. It is amazing that doesn't mean we don't have problems; but it means it has gotten so much better.

Now, one of the questions had to do with how many people die in natural disasters. It is true the number of natural disasters has increased slightly and it is chalked up to global warming - which I do believe is a serious concern and will continue to get worse. But not as many people - by half - are dying because infrastructure is so much better, even in places like Indonesia where they had that horrible earthquake and the tsunami, and they had all of those problems. Less than half of the people died than would have died 20 or 30 years earlier, because they had the infrastructure improvements to get them water sooner, to get them food quicker. Their buildings had been built stronger to withstand more. They were able to survive longer and to rebuild quicker.

It is amazing how much better our world has become in just that short period of time. We are not living in this horrible age. We are improving so well and so quickly. The challenge is that we do not just ride on our laurels; that we continue to see ourselves as an improving world - that God is helping to make those improvements.

There are still places that we need to reach out to. There remain places in Africa that are dealing with civil war, where people are dying at high rates - certainly in Syria and in

Yemen it is devastating, but that is nine percent from 29 percent, just 20 years ago. As that continues, if we can continue to provide opportunities, if we can continue to negotiate healthy responses, so that there will not be these levels of civil war, that number will get almost to zero.

And, it's technology, it's compassion, the very thing that we talked about with the media creating drama, has also been an amazing blessing. The media has been the greatest gift, because it has pulled the humanitarian issues out; because then we could just say that the statistics sound awful, but now the media gives us the blessing of *seeing* the inhumanity [to which] we are responding. That is the gift and it shows that we should not give up on human beings, but it shows that when human beings are faced - forced to watch - with what is happening in the world, we almost always respond in a healthy, healing manner.

That's why these statistics are changing so quickly, so dramatically. It is an amazing blessing.

Now, I only have a couple of minutes to preach, so I didn't want to bore you with too many statistics. What I would encourage you to do is go back and read the book "Factfulness." He gives you ten reasons why we are wrong about the world today. The author is a German and his name is Hans Rosling.

He took all of his information from the United Nations and from other very reputable places, and he is not saying, look we don't have to work anymore, and he is not saying that even with the first-world nations there are not problems, but he *is* saying that, even in the midst of these issues we need to recognize where we are improving, so that we can turn our resources on the areas where there is still need. If we think there is still 59 percent of the people in abject poverty, then we are not placing our resources in the places that could do the most good - with the 9 percent who are really suffering, and with the people in the first world, who do not have those benefits and opportunities as well. This does not mean our work is done. The horrors are still out there, but there are not as many.

The reason I am sharing that is not so that you won't care anymore about responding to the needs of the poor, but that so you won't give up. I feel sometimes, in the society that we are in today, like we are riding on the Titanic, so why even bother?

The reality is that we can see God at work making change - improving things dramatically - and that is why on this day, when we are talking about an apocalyptic moment in Revelation 1:4-8, if they had known then some 2,000 years ago that there would be a day when only nine percent of the world's population would be in poverty, it would be beyond anyone's comprehension. Imagine how much better we could be with God's help, supporting us and guiding us, to continue to grow and evolve with compassion and heart.

So, a lot of Sundays you will hear negative things. You will hear things about how we are not moving up, we are not caring enough - how we can continue to respond. But, I hope today, that as you leave today, on this Thanksgiving weekend, that you will give thanks to God, recognizing that it [the world] isn't going to heck in a hand basket.

We are really improving as a society. It is our technology, but it is also our compassion. It is the fact that we are not so racially divided, because we see brothers and sisters of other

ethnic backgrounds, of other races and creeds and religions, and we say, “you are ours, and we want to help you, and we need you to help us,” and it has made all of the difference in the world.

So I hope you will leave here today, knowing that God is still at work. The world is getting better and we can continue to make a difference - until that day that there is not a single mouth that is hungry, or a single soul that is lost.

And we give thanks to God, in Jesus name. Amen.