

Sermon: Jesus is the Answer

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Scriptures: John 14

Introduction

I open with a burning question that is more serious than it will seem in the asking. I will warn you: it has an edge to it. It is THE question that divides all peoples, everywhere. The question of the hour is, What are you going to do with Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed for Himself deity and issued a demand that everyone repent of their sin and believe in Him and Him alone for salvation?

In July of 2007, 42-year old Chinese Christian Li Mei and nine house church leaders were arrested in China, charged with singing Christian hymns to villagers, showing the Jesus film in a nursing home, and praying for the healing of a disabled elderly man. They were sentenced to re-education through labor for 12-18 months. Li Mei has served part of her sentence in a hospital with her hands chained to the bed, where she was repeatedly beaten and tortured, so violently, in fact, that it caused her to require a hysterectomy. She is currently serving the remainder of her sentence, a prisoner of the state, accused of being a Christian.

Why was she arrested, like hundreds of thousands others around the globe who profess Jesus to be their Savior and Lord? And why was she treated with such focused hatred? Because Jesus confronts every person in every culture in every nation with the unflinching command to obey the Gospel by repenting of sin and trusting fully in Him as the one and only means of being right with God. What did they do with Jesus? They attacked Him by brutalizing His follower because they recognize that Jesus is a threat to everything they believe and have built their lives upon.

On April 16, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people and wounded many more before taking his own life in a horrific rampage on the campus of Virginia Tech. We were glued to the images carried on every news agency. Shock mingled with deep grief struck the nation. But there was yet another stunning thing coming.

As campus officials planned the memorial service that would be televised live across our nation, they determined that it should be an interfaith service. As the cameras rolled, we heard a Buddhist quote the Dalai Lama and refer to the basic goodness of man. There was a Jewish woman who read from Ecclesiastes 3. A Muslim quoted from the Quran and appealed to Allah. And a liberal Lutheran pastor gave a brief, empty pep talk about sticking together and helping one another.

But no one mentioned Jesus Christ in the entire memorial service. What did they do with Jesus? They omitted any reference to Him. And there's a reason for that. Christ's claims about Himself and what is proclaimed about Him in the Bible are so specific and exclusive that He is offensive to a pluralistic, all-roads-lead-to-heaven culture. Almost everything is tolerated in the public arena but Jesus.

On Thursday, March 22, 2008, the Burlington Township High School of Burlington, New Jersey, conducted a mock terrorist drill to train the student body in evacuation practices should some crazed persons enter the premises waving guns. The school superintendent Chris Manno stated that the goal was "to practice under conditions that are as real as possible . . . "

But the story they made up didn't involve gothic-dressed drug addicts or America-hating jihadists. Instead, the hostage-taking madmen in this make-believe drill were two Christians who were seeking justice because the daughter of one of them was expelled for praying in class.

Why in the world would school officials make Christians the villains if they were trying to be "as real as possible"? Because our culture increasingly sees the demands of Jesus on the world are just as far out as the crazy, violent tenets of Islam. What did the principal of this New Jersey school do with Jesus? He caricatured Him in the eyes of the students and teachers by depicting His followers as borderline lunatics that are just waiting for the right trigger to set them off.

So I ask you again, sitting there listening to me: What are you going to do with Jesus? This is part four in our series "Opening Your Trauma Toolbox." So far, we have set the nail on three anchor truths that will keep you safe and stable and strong when the storm hits. Last week, we examined Ephesians 2 and faced the necessary truth about ourselves. We are lost. More specifically, we are dead in our trespasses and sins, dominated by the Devil, and destined for hell.

All of our self-help efforts and religious rituals can do nothing to change this. Oh how we need Someone to rescue us; Someone powerful enough to raise us from our spiritual death and make us alive to God; Someone strong enough to overcome the rule of Satan in our lives; Someone with the power of God Himself to secure our destiny in heaven forever!

This morning, I present to you that Savior whose disciples are persecuted and killed in this world and whose gospel is increasingly marginalized in our own country. I will not give you a set of ideas to mull over and decide whether to accept or reject. I will instead lay before you the One God sent, whom the Bible consistently presents as our only hope of forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and a new life that never ends. Consider now the straight, unvarnished statement of one of the eyewitnesses to Jesus in the Bible. And ask yourself, "What am I going to do with Jesus?"

Go with me to an upstairs room where Jesus and His disciples are gathered to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Passover. While they are feasting and re-telling the story of God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, Jesus explains that He is about to leave them. Knowing that the cross is just hours away, He tells them in John 13:33, "Where I am going you cannot come."

This was very upsetting to His friends, and Peter - always the first to react - asks for more information. In v. 36, he asks, "Lord, where are You going? Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow later." Peter pressed the issue in the next verse: "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for You."

Peter and the disciples clearly didn't understand what was about to happen and why Jesus would no longer be with them. Jesus demonstrates His sovereign insight into Peter's heart when He quietly answers, "Will you lay down your life for Me? I assure you: a rooster will not crow till you have denied Me three times."

As Peter mulled over Jesus' hard words to him, Jesus addresses the whole group. In John Chapter 14, with great tenderness, Jesus will utter some of the most startling and powerful words of His entire ministry. Can you feel how personal He gets with His followers in the opening verses? "Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also. You know the way where I am going."

Now look at what is happening here. Jesus is telling them about where He is going. He's going to heaven, to where the Father is. They will be separate for a time. But while they are apart, Jesus will be working on a place there for them, which of course means that He will be coming for them one day.

And then He adds this sentence: And you know the way where I'm going. You already know the road that leads to heaven. Jesus deliberately planted this to grab their curiosity. Jesus says I already know something that I can't really pull up right now. Did I miss a point in one of His earlier teachings?

Thankfully, Thomas refused to pretend to understand when he didn't. He doesn't care if he looks ignorant. He wants to know. "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?"

And now we're ready for one of the most riveting statements Jesus ever made. It sets Him apart from everyone else. This one line alone, spoken in hushed tones to a small group in that upstairs room, is why His followers are hunted down in China and His Gospel is silenced in funeral services. In John 14:6, Jesus answers Thomas and all of us: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me" (v. 6). That categorically tells you that one way is right and every other way is wrong. It's all or nothing. It's either or. Think for a moment about the full meaning of these words. Jesus knows that the cross awaits Him in a few hours, knows what it means and why it must happen. In that context, He says,

I. I Am the Way

... by which He means, "The way to heaven is not a religious system or a set of spiritual teachings to follow. The way cannot be found in you or your sincere efforts. The way is Me. You know the way to where I am going because it's Me. The minute you reduce the path to where I'm going down to a list of do's and don'ts, or try to come up with an alternative approach to getting right with God the Father, you've put yourself on a path that leads to destruction."

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." (Proverbs 14:12) If you want to be reconciled with a Holy God, if you want to cross the chasm of sin that separates you from Him, if you want to go where I am going, I am your bridge."

II. I Am the truth

When He says I am the Truth, He means, "Trust Me in this. Count on what I'm saying to you. I am about to pay for your forgiveness with My blood. I cannot love you more than I do. And what I'm about to do on the cross is all that is needed to build this bridge. You cross it by believing in Me, trusting that what I've done for you is all you'll ever need to be right with God. There are a lot of people out there that will tell you that they know the truth. Hear Me clearly: I am not giving you truth; I am the Truth, the whole Truth, nothing but the Truth. You can trust Me."

III. I Am the life

When He says I am the Life, He means, "There is a kind of life that is only a shadow of what God created it to be. Life without Me is like an echo; it is at best the fading reflection of the real thing, here for a moment and then gone. But the life I give is abundant and eternal. It outlasts the few years we have here. It easily outshines what this world can offer. It is the very life of God in you. I'm not here to point you to this kind of life. I am your life. Let Me loose in you and watch what happens!"

Now Jesus could have stopped right there and it would be enough to pin us to our seats in wonder. But He doesn't stop there. He ups the ante even more when He adds, No one comes to the Father except through Me. Basically that means that we can add the word only to each preceding phrase. I am the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life.

Now maybe you're here this morning and this assertion really bugs you. You find yourself agreeing with those who think Christianity is too narrow, a bit arrogant, and insistent. It just seems that God is great enough to make multiple ways to heaven. May I suggest a counter conclusion? I think this is one of the most wonderful realities in the world. Let me tell you why and then we'll close.

A. It is wonderful because it's clear

When you're trying to get somewhere, what you need is clarity. Nobody is satisfied with vague directions to a location to which you've never been. I love the example of a trip to Disneyworld. Rather than making reservations, you show up at the airport and you see a flight listed up on the monitor: Flight 2020 to Orlando. Next to the flight number it says, "Gates 21-29." That doesn't make much sense to you, but you head down to that area, figuring someone will point you to the proper gate when you get there.

When you arrive, you find that none of the gates have signs on them indicating the flight number or the destination. There are planes out there, and people waiting to board, but you don't know where any of them are going. You turn to some of your fellow travelers and ask, "Which of these flights is going to Orlando?"

They say, "Oh, we were just discussing that. John here likes the look of that 747 out there, so he's going to go through Gate 26. But 22 has always been my lucky number, so I'm taking gate 22." Some lady nearby says, "My son-in-law travels all the time. He knows all about airports. And he said last time he went to Orlando he went out of gate 25, so that's what I'm going to take."

You say, "Yeah, but how do you know it's going to Orlando?" She answers, "Well, who can really know anything for sure? I figure I've got as good a chance as anybody of getting on the right plane."

Finally, you can't take it anymore, so you go to the desk and ask which of these flights is 2020 to Orlando. And the staff member says, "It's not our policy to tell people which gate they have to fly out of. That would be rather narrow-minded, wouldn't it? I mean, these are all wonderful planes with hard-working crews and sincere passengers. Who are we to say that one is better than another? Take whichever one you want. They're all going somewhere."

How ridiculous and irresponsible would that be?! Just as ridiculous as it is to suggest that all roads lead to heaven, and just as irresponsible as to withhold information that can help people get where they want to go. If you don't care where you spend eternity, then it doesn't matter which road you take. But if you want to go to heaven, you'd better be sure you're on the right track. That's the wonderful thing about this narrow way Jesus described - it's clearly marked so you know what is required of you.

B. It's wonderful because it actually works

What Jesus promises, He delivers. He can get you where you most want to go - heaven forever with God. He can give you what you most want - freedom from sin and real purpose in life. I can say this boldly for two reasons. A) He personally demonstrated what He said. He spoke the most profound words the world has ever heard. He lived the most remarkable, influential life in human history. He healed diseases, commanded the forces of nature, raised people from the dead, voluntarily died in the place of sinners like us, and was resurrected from the dead, just as He said. Jesus stands alone in His claims and in His acts.

The second reason is B) Untold millions of people who have followed Jesus have testified that He has, in fact, transformed their lives. They have been forgiven, delivered, and changed.

C. It's wonderful because it's available to anyone

Anyone can believe this. The Bible says it like this: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom. 10:13)

Conclusion

So here's what's at stake. You can hear Jesus' bold statement and conclude that it is intolerant and pushy and arrogant. Or you can see in this the most loving act in history, when the Son of God comes for you, secures what you need most, and then points the way for you to get in on it. I ask you again, "What will you do with Jesus?" One day, when everything falls apart in your life, you'll be needing a Savior like Him to keep you and be with you. Why not settle this today?