

Is There Only One Way To Jesus? You Asked For It

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Welcome everyone! My name is Emerson. We're in a series right now called *You Asked For It*, where we're digging into life's biggest questions. Last week, Dan made a compelling case that there's got to be something more than this physical, material universe and that perhaps God is needed to explain the origins of the universe, the origins of life, and metaphysical reality. So today, we're digging into that a bit more and looking at the question, "Is there really only one way to God?"

Now, as a Christian, you might think that question is "easy." Some of you see a question like that and think, "Oh, YES. DUH. John 14:6 baby – case closed!" But for others of us, it's not so easy to answer, is it?

We live in a pluralistic society. Which means we like our options. Case and point: I went trekking into Meijer on Southport last week and as I walked down the ice cream aisle, I could not believe my eyes. Let me just show you this picture of the ice cream aisle. I don't even know if you can see the end of aisle, but it's *way* down there. The aisle is huge! If the picture doesn't do it for you, here's a video. Folks, it took me 34 seconds worth of walking to get from one end of the ice cream aisle to the other. 34 SECONDS! That is options galore! That is plurality galore! And let me just say, that is an *indictment* on you and me. That is a direct result of our consumer habits! I digress.

It's a silly illustration, but the point is that we live in a world of options and we value above all the ability *to choose* our own thing – culture, values, lifestyle, etc. Maybe you've seen the bumper sticker "coexist." We like to choose everything, from the religion we ascribe to, down to the ice cream we think best. And that makes *knowing truth* about spiritual reality feel hard.

I mean, how can anyone say their religion is the only true religion? Doesn't that negate the religious experiences of other people? Aren't all religions like the same path up the mountain? Aren't our religious beliefs and worldviews socially conditioned? What happens to people who don't hold to your religion? How can we truly know anything about the metaphysical world? Why not just love others?

It's interesting, however, because there are some things we feel we *know* – like that the capital of France is Paris or that 2+2 does not equal 5. See what I mean? But when it comes to religion, we're tempted to say, "I'm agnostic" or that "We're keeping an open mind" or that "We don't really know." Philosopher Dallas Willard quips that you never hear anyone say they're agnostic about anything they take seriously. Imagine you're asked at the airport what gate you're at and you say, "I'm agnostic. I don't know. I'm trying to keep an open mind."

Ok, jokes aside, let's look at a story from Acts 3-4 to help us think through this topic.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter

looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

I begin here with this story of healing because...well, I guess because it’s *beautiful* and it’s *good*.

Here in Acts, we have a man suffering who was lame from birth. Because of his physical state he was a burden, he’d be shamed, and had to be “put” at the Temple each day. “*Here’s your place. Stay here. Don’t be any more of a burden than you already are.*” So, here’s this dejected man and he encounters two followers of Jesus, Peter and John. He asks them for money. They don’t have any. BUT they “look straight at him.” They don’t avoid eye contact! They see this man’s dignity and worth! And *just as amazing* is that Peter takes him by the hand and he says, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” And BOOM. The lame man was healed. Strength and vigor come rushing into his legs and ankles. He needed no practice walking; he was just *able*. As the story says, “He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.” Like a cooped-up horse set free from his stable, this man gallops away finally free from his physical bondage.

Now, you can perhaps disbelieve this story happened, but the point I’m making here is an aesthetic one because I think we can all acknowledge that there’s a part of you and a part of me that would *like* for this kind of thing to be true. Is that not *beautiful*? Is that not *good*? Don’t we long for that? And if we *long* for justice and mercy and peace and restoration and redemption for ourselves and our world...where is that found? How do we get it?

Well, the story continues. People see this lame man walking. They’re bewildered. Everyone was “Filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.” They’re wondering the same questions. *What happened? Where is that found? How do we get it?* So, Peter stands up and tells the people what kind of Reality could do this. He says:

“Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.”

Now, as you can see, for Peter, it’s not so much about *WHERE* or *HOW* life is found. No, for Peter, it’s more about *WHO* life is found *IN*.

Peter has no issue standing up in front of a crowd, people with their own perceptions of the gods and of spiritual reality and sharing *WHO* could bring about such a transformation. And as Peter is saying this, he and John are thrown in jail for their words and are then dragged before some

religious leaders who ask them what the heck is going on. And Peter again stands up and speaks. He says over in chapter 4:

“Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

And here’s the thing...Peter and John enter into this lame man’s suffering and bring him out of it *because* of Jesus. In Jesus, God did that very same thing on the cross for *them* – God entered into their suffering to bring them out of it – to bring redemption and restoration to the whole world. No other worldview or faith tradition does that.

Christianity claims to possess *knowledge* and *truth* about reality. The truth of spiritual reality, however, does not *center* on a *perception* of the world. I think that’s where people get hung up on this question – if it’s perception, how’s your perception better than mine? For Peter, *and this is important*, spiritual reality centers on a PERSON. Reality is found in Jesus according to Christianity. No other name. No other worldview. No other religion. *Jesus*.

That’s one of the things I’ve had to wrestle through when I think about this whole “Is there only one way to God?” question. I’ve *got* to deal with Jesus. And for me, there are three IFs that help me kind of formulate an answer to the question: “Is there one way to God?”

First: yes, there is only one way to God, IF...Jesus is who he said he is.

Jesus, throughout the gospels, claimed all kinds of things:

Jesus claimed to give eternal life (John 3:16)
Jesus claimed to forgive sin (Mark 2:10)
Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (Matthew 26)
Jesus claimed to be God’s Messiah (John 4:26)
Jesus claimed to be one with the Father (John 10:30)
Jesus claimed to be the door to salvation (John 10:9)
Jesus claimed to be the Bread of life (John 6:35)
Jesus claimed to be Living water (John 8:12)
Jesus claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
Jesus claimed to be the Light (John 8:12)
Jesus claimed to be the Gate (John 10:9)
Jesus claimed to be the Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
Jesus claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)

Every other religious system or religious guru – from Muhammad to Buddha – makes *nowhere near* the kind of claims that Jesus makes. Every other religious guru says, “Here’s the door, here’s the path, here’s the way, here’s the truth, here’s where true life is found, here’s the

light...” But Jesus literally says, “I AM the way, I AM the door, I AM the light, and I AM the resurrection and the life!” So, Jesus made some pretty outstanding claims about himself...but that’s not all.

Yes, there is only one way to God, IF...Jesus did what Scripture says he did.

In the Scriptures, Jesus is said to have given sight to the blind, healed the sick, made the lame walk, multiply 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish to feed thousands of people, walked on water, to have brought someone back from the dead, to have calmed storms, to have changed water into wine, to cast out demons. He is said to have loved without condition, to have spoken truth with authority, to have had compassion without reservation, and to have lived a sin-free life.

If what’s in the gospels is true, then you have to deal with all that Jesus *did* during his ministry.

Yes, there is only one way to God, IF...Jesus rose from the grave.

Christianity claims that Jesus of Nazareth was betrayed, tortured, crucified on a cross, that he died, stayed in a tomb for three days, surrounded by Roman guards, and then three days later that God raised him up from the grave – vindicating everything he said and vindicating everything he did. Everything rests on the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, Paul the Apostle even says, “If Christ has not been raised then your faith is in vain.” If Jesus rose from the dead, you’ve got to deal with that.

Now, with all that being said, here’s where I’ve landed – either Jesus is who he said he is and did the things Scripture says he did, and he rose from the grave and so *is on a level higher* than other religious leaders, thus putting Christianity above other religions as the truth, OR he didn’t. And because of that he is either a loony or a liar or both and so therefore is on *a level lower*. To answer this question of is there only one way to God, from a Christian perspective, I’ve got to figure out what to do with *Jesus*.

But let’s say all of that about Jesus is true! Why do we still feel tension in proclaiming that truth? Well, we don’t want to be disrespectful (obviously). And please don’t be *weird* about it. But I think the tension I feel comes from three main places: arrogance, exclusivity, and presumption.

If we say YES, there is only one way to God, isn’t that arrogant?

I feel like I hear this a lot from people. The critique kind of goes like this: “*It’s arrogant to say that you have the truth and to convert people to it.*” The only problem with a statement like that is that that statement purports to do the very thing that it is against. Shrouded in humility, this claim is actually arrogant itself.

It’s a very Western way of looking at the world. Imagine saying to a Muslim woman from Somalia or a Jewish man in Israel or a Hindu family in India *that phrase: it’s arrogant to say that you have the truth and to convert people to it.* These people groups think that there is absolute truth on this matter. So, if it’s arrogant to claim that your religion is the truth then it’s at

least just as arrogant to say that it is arrogant to claim that you have the truth because it assumes that you yourself know the truth about spiritual reality.

One can claim and share truth with humility. A good math teacher will not teach truth to her students arrogantly. If she's a good teacher she'll share truth in a humble way so that her students will be receptive to her teaching. And I think that *Christianity holds its convictions with the utmost humility*. Why? Because Christians believe that salvation through and knowledge of God comes because of GRACE, not through personal enlightenment, not through one's intellect, not through special social status, not through whatever...but because of *grace*. We don't earn it. It is given. And because of that we don't mock, we don't look down upon, we don't disrespect, and we don't feel ourselves to be superior. We engage with our neighbors in love, we listen, we humble ourselves.

If we say YES, there is only one way to God, isn't that exclusive?

"*Your religion can't be true because that's too exclusive,*" is what we hear. This one *feels* really compelling to me.

I want you to imagine you're in the Chicago O'Hare airport. Imagine that it's prime travel season and it's prime travel time. There are loads of people passing by you. People of all different shapes, sizes, colors, complexions. People with different smells. People in different groups – some families, some individuals, some couples. You see parents and grandparents; you see teens and toddlers. You've got people sitting on your right and on your left. You're just sitting there, taking everything in.

I've been in that situation before, and honestly, it gives me anxiety. Because in daily life, I'm not aware of just *how many* people exist on this planet with different religious beliefs, lifestyles, ethics, etc. But being at the airport gives me a bigger perspective. It's a bit overwhelming.

What has helped is knowing that...

One, we're all exclusive to some degree (if you don't believe me, just think about how exclusive your marriage *hopefully* is. In fact, you need that exclusivity to maintain *intimacy* and an *identity* – sports teams are exclusive, Sam's Club is exclusive, etc.)

Two, this critique is actually self-refuting. Those who say it's exclusive to make exclusive religious claims are themselves making a claim that actually excludes the views of others! If you say, "You **HAVE** to be inclusive of all viewpoints," what if my viewpoint or religion says that some form of exclusion is okay? Will you be inclusive of me and my viewpoint? No? Isn't that exclusionary? But still, while you can logic that all day, the tension still exists.

And three, while Christianity is incredibly exclusive, it's also the *most* inclusive. Why? Because while we *exclusively* center on Jesus, since we're all sinners saved by grace, we don't think of ourselves as superior to anyone. We're not better than. Everyone's welcome to the table. *Christianity is the most inclusive exclusivity.*

And we see this reality at play – Christianity is the most inclusive religion by far. Look at the global map and you’ll see that 13.1% of Christians are located in Asia-pacific regions, 23.6% of Christians are African, 25% of Christians are European, and 36% of Christians are from the Americas (north and south!). Unlike Islam, Hinduism, etc., which are all primarily geographically located in the regions where they began.

If we say YES, there is only one way to God, isn’t that presumptuous?

Here the critique is basically, “*Every religion sees part of the truth, no religion sees the whole truth.*” But, again, this refutes itself. You’ll often hear people who say this also use an illustration of a mountain – something like “all religions are just different paths up the same mountain” or you hear the story of the blind men and the elephant, which goes like this:

Several blind men were walking along and came upon an elephant that allowed them to touch it and feel it. “This creature is long and flexible like a snake,” said the first blind man, clutching the elephant’s trunk. “No,” replied the second blind man, “this creature is thick and round like a tree trunk,” feeling the elephant’s leg. “No, you’re all wrong,” cried the third man. “An elephant is large and flat,” he said, touching the elephant’s side.

Each man could only touch part of the elephant. None could see the entirety of the elephant. And in the same way, it is argued, the religions of the world each have a grasp on part of the truth about spiritual reality, but just like the blind men and the elephant, they don’t see the whole picture or say that they have a comprehensive view of the truth.

That is really convincing, but it actually backfires. Here’s how: this story is told from the perspective of someone who is NOT blind. How could you know that each blind man sees only part of the elephant unless YOU see the entirety of the elephant??? It’s convincing because it seems like one is approaching the topic of spiritual reality with humility, but it is actually *just as presumptuous* to claim that every religion sees part of the truth as it is for Christians or Muslims or whoever to say that their religion is the true religion! So what do we do? How do we *know*?

But we also know because this story we read in the Bible with Peter and John isn’t propaganda. It’s the transmission of eyewitness testimony. And if you go back to Peter and John, we see they’re standing before the religious leaders and they’re commanded to not speak of Jesus any longer. And here’s what they say: Acts 4:20 “As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. What did they see? What did they hear? They saw Jesus of Nazareth betrayed, tortured, crucified. They saw him die. They saw him resurrected. They saw that God, the Supreme Creator of the entire universe become creation. They saw that this God is actually personal. That this God wants a relationship with us.

Like Peter and John, *this* God came into our situation as Jesus Christ. He looked us (we, who are all lame beggars because of our sin) – he looked us in the eye, took us by the hand, and gave us the ability to walk again through Christ Jesus. No other religion can say that. There is only one way to God. It’s Jesus.