

The Uniqueness of Jesus in a World of Other Religions

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[0 : 00] in a gorilla suit and act the part for the summer until funds improved. Very strange job, but the salary was fantastic. It was a lovely gorilla suit, so he agreed.

Well, the first day of the job was pretty easy. He walked around the gorilla enclosure. He made half-hearted monkey noises, and the crowd seemed to be fooled. Nobody was any the wiser. People stopped and took photographs, that kind of thing.

But it was very boring. So on day two, he decided he would raise the stakes slightly. He began leaping around the gorilla enclosure. He roared. He beat his chest. He swung from branch to branch, that kind of thing.

Crowds grew. Camera phones flashed. People even threw peanuts and M&Ms.; Great bonus. Really good, but still a bit boring. So on day three, he decided to kick it up even a further gear. Hanging in the middle of the gorilla enclosure was a vine, was a creeper. And he grabbed hold of this creeper, and he began to swing to and fro, roaring fiercely at his most impressive gorilla voice.

[0 : 56] And higher and higher he swung. The crowds grew bigger and bigger. The higher he swung, the more they cheered, until he finally overdid it. Swung just a little bit too high, and the creeper broke.

And he flew in a graceful parabolic arc out of the gorilla enclosure, and landed with a crash in the lion enclosure next door. He comes around from the mild concussion to see a large, angry-looking lion advancing on him, muscles rippling beneath its silky fur, saliva dripping from every fang.

So in panic, he begins crying out to the crowds, Help, help, help! I'm not really a gorilla. I'm just a man in a suit. Help, somebody save me! Well, in one fluid motion, the lion leapt.

It sprang. It pinned him to the floor. And then it said in a fierce whisper, Shut up! You'll get us all fired! It's weird! Totally true! Thank you, one person who really liked that joke.

The reason I open with that really bad, I guess, dad joke, my six-year-old daughter would say, is I think it illustrates the way that many people think about religion. Many people in our world, I think, think that the different religions of the world are a bit like the animals in that story.

[2 : 08] Outwardly, they may look different, but underneath, they are exactly the same. And I think that's a very common view of religions. And as I said a few moments ago, you know, we live in a very pluralistic age.

We live surrounded by different religions. I live in Dundee now, which is, in fact, the center of the universe, in case you weren't sure. Or they say the Dundonians tell me every day. But I actually grew up in London, which I thought was the center of the universe.

And where I lived in London, you could choose from every religion conceivable. Where I lived in London, you could choose from, you know, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism, Islamism, secularism, atheism.

You could even be a Crystal Palace FC fan. We called that masochism. All those different ideologies. And given that wealth of belief systems, I'm sure the same is true here in Glasgow, as it is in other major cities.

One of the accusations flung at Christians, therefore, is given this big diversity, and given the assumption that most people have, that the religions of the world are basically the same, Christians are often accused of being arrogant.

[3 : 12] We're accused of being bigoted. We're accused of being intolerant. Because we want to say, Christians want to say, that the God of the Bible, that Jesus is unique, that there's something different about him, and that the other religions are wrong.

And I'm so often told, particularly when I speak to hostile audiences, particularly when I go on to university campuses, I so often hear people say to me, you know, why can't, Andy, you Christians just affirm that all the religions of the world are identical?

They're exactly the same, or virtually the same. Wouldn't that way lie peace, and harmony, and rainbows, and unicorns, and kittens, and all kinds of other things? Well, let's try and dig a little bit deeper into that question this evening, and particularly come into land on some of what Jesus said in this paragraph, this, a few paragraphs in John's Gospel we've read.

And the first thing I want to observe is really interesting. You know, there are two types of people who think that all religions are the same. There are two types of people who think this, and the first type of people might surprise you.

The first type of person I regularly meet who insists to me that all religions are the same are my atheist friends. And my atheist friends like to tell me all religions are equal because they are all equally wrong.

[4 : 24] It doesn't matter whether you are Buddhist, Baha'i, or Baptist, you are bonkers. In the eyes of my atheist friends, religion is dangerous nonsense. And in fact, the person who perhaps put this the most bluntly was the later atheist writer, Christopher Hitchens, who a few years ago, before he tragically died quite young, famously said in his book, *God is Not Great*, Hitchens says, religion poisons everything.

Religion poisons everything. Why? Hitchens would say, well, because religion causes war, it causes violence, it causes intolerance, hatred, division, discrimination, it probably even causes bad breath.

You know, religion poisons everything. And so for an atheist like Christopher Hitchens, and maybe you have friends who are like this, maybe if you're here as a visitor this evening, you're sitting here thinking, you know, I actually broadly agree with him.

Look at the problems religion has caused. You know, if you're an atheist of this persuasion, then all religions are the same. They're all equally stupid. But there is a problem with this view. There is a problem with this atheist view of religion.

Several problems, in fact, firstly, of course, it's slightly lazy because not all religions are the same. For example, not all religions believe in God. For many of my Buddhist friends, for example, they don't believe in God.

[5 : 36] They vehemently don't. Buddhism in many forms is an atheistic religion. So to lump all religions together and simply dismiss them all is intellectually lazy. It's rather like saying, I don't bother going to the library because all authors are stupid.

Some authors maybe, but to dismiss all of them is a little bit hasty if I haven't read my way through the entire library catalog. There's a second problem too, especially with this idea that religion is the cause of all kinds of evil, wars and tribalism and so on.

And the problem that awaits you if you're an atheist like Hitchens who wants to go this route is you could say exactly the same thing. Religion poisons everything. You could take that little sentence and apply it to other things.

For example, you might want to say that politics poisons everything. I mean, politics causes division and war and hatred, Brexit, you know, all kinds of things.

Politics poisons everything. What about money? Money causes crime and jealousy and greed and Simon Cowell and, you know, all kinds of things. The list goes on and on and on.

[6 : 39] You always tell what TV programs people watch and the reactions you get when you poke fun at people. And what about even, interestingly, we might, one of the problems with that little experiment as you do it is you very quickly realize that the problem is not religion or politics or money.

The problem you really discover as you press into this is that everything that human beings can lay hold of we can use to cause great harm as well as cause great good.

And what's interesting is what do religion and politics and money and if we had time we could add other nouns into that list, what do they have in common? What do they have in common? What do they have in common? It's human beings.

Human beings seem to have this ability to pick up things and use them for good and use them for evil. The problem doesn't seem to be so much out there somewhere. The problem seems to be in here somewhere. And interestingly, the writer, the Christian writer in fact, who identified this perhaps the most powerfully was a gentleman called Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

And if you've ever come across Alexander, he's a fascinating read. He was a Russian political activist imprisoned by the Soviets and the gulags for his political beliefs and became a Christian while imprisoned.

[7 : 47] And while reflecting on what he'd been through and the suffering and persecution he'd experienced, he read a massive book called *The Gulag Archipelago* which is so big you could kind of stand on it and use it to climb Munro's with.

But it's an amazing book. And in that book, he talks about what's wrong with the world. And it'd be very easy for Alexander to say, look, the problem is communism because it's the communists who've locked me up. He doesn't. Instead, he writes these very famous words in the middle of his book.

He says, the dividing line, the dividing line between good and evil runs not between states or between parties or between ideologies. The dividing line between good and evil runs right through the middle of every human heart.

And if he's correct, then of course what the world needs as an answer to violence and injustice and poverty and pain is not a clever philosophy, not more education, not more money, not more politics even because none will fundamentally change anything.

Rather, it needs something that can radically transform the human heart and our tendency to weaponize things, politics, money, or religion and use them for good as well as evil.

[8 : 50] How do we transform the human heart? Well, I think Jesus had quite a lot to say about that but we'll come to that in just a moment. Before we get to Jesus and John 14, one other type of person who thinks that everything, all religions are the same.

My atheist friends think this but there is one other type of person who has a tendency to tell us that all religions are the same and this is my pluralist friends. If you're a pluralist, the great cry of pluralism is all religions lead to God.

Every road leads to the top of the mountain. Believe whatever you want as long as you are sincere. If you're a pluralist, you believe that if God exists, he or she is possibly an equal opportunities employer and it doesn't matter what you believe, you'll get to heaven in the end.

For many people, this leads to a kind of pick and mix approach to religion. Now what's interesting, having talked to many pluralist friends across the years, I think what unites them, what animates them is this kind of idea that every religion represents the same thing.

And for many pluralists, you know, God, if he or she exists, is out there in the fog somewhere and is unknowable. And so what religions represent is human beings' best attempts to figure out what God is like.

[10 : 01] And so Christianity is one guess and Islam is one guess and Buddhism is one guess. And of course, if religion is just your best guess about what God is like, it would be incredibly arrogant of a Christian like myself to say that, you know, my guess is better than your guess and so on.

In fact, there's a famous story often told by pluralists to illustrate this and it's called *The Story of the Blind Men and the Elephants*. Some of you may have heard it before. And it tells the story of an Indian king who invited four blind men into his throne room to meet an elephant for the first time. None of them had ever encountered an elephant and he sort of pushed them off in the direction of the elephant and said, go discover what an elephant is like. And the first blind man grabbed hold of the elephant's mighty trunk and gave it a tug and he said, ah, an elephant is like a snake. Or the second blind man grabbed hold of one of the elephant's mighty legs and he said, I don't know what you're smoking. Elephant's like a tree. And the third blind man grabbed hold of the elephant's tail and gave it a tug and he went, you two guys are insane because an elephant's like a rope.

And the fourth blind man stumbled into the side of the mighty beast and he went, I have no idea what you guys are talking about. You're wrong. An elephant's like a wall. And they started arguing and fighting and soon blows were being traded and meanwhile the king sat up there on his throne and laughed and laughed and laughed.

[11 : 21] And the point of that story, the point of that ancient Indian parable, you can probably see the point, right? Each blind man was right in his own way. Each of them had a small part of the truth and if they could just recognize they had just a part of the elephant and not the whole elephant, then they could have sort of, you know, come together and got along with one another and it would have been harmony.

And that illustration is often applied to religion and people say, look, if only, you know, the Buddhists and the Hindus and the Baptists and the Baha'is and the Muslims and whatever could all recognize that in our different religions we just have part of the elephant, part of God, then of course we could all be, you know, in a much more harmonious world.

And the story is often used to, you know, sort of argue against arrogance in religious claims and so forth. But it's an interesting question to reflect on for a moment as you think about that story and ask yourself the question, who is the most arrogant person in the story?

Not actually any of the blind men. The most arrogant person in the story is the king sat up there on the throne who can see everything and laugh smugly at everybody else. When I've had pluralist friends tell me this story and try to use it to sort of make me feel a bit inferior as a Christian who believes, you know, that Jesus is something special.

I always like to look at my pluralist friends and say, interesting, this sounds quite arrogant. You seem to be claiming to be the only human being who can see the whole elephant. And all these Muslims and all these Christians and all these Jews and all these other people, if only they were as wise and enlightened as you and realized that they could see that the whole elephant was something else, then there would be a better place.

[12:50] It's interesting that a parable that is often told to critique religious exclusivity actually ends up being incredibly arrogant. But there's a much, much bigger problem with the pluralist idea that the different religions of the world represent just human beings fumbling attempts to reach God and it's that that's not the Christian claim at all.

The Christian claim is not a, you know, the Christianity is some kind of wonderful guess about what God is like because we can't know. The Christian claim actually reverses the whole picture and says as human beings we can't reach up to God but God can actually as it were step out of the fog and come to us and that's what he's done.

And earlier in John's Gospel in one of the most famous verses in the Bible in John 3 verses 16 and 17 we read these words for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life.

God did not send his son into the world to condemn it but to save the world through him. And that story of God not being content to stand outside the picture and just leave us to figure out what he's like but stepping into history in the person of Jesus brings us nicely to the person of Jesus.

And I always say, you know, it's interesting, right? Whatever you think here this evening, if you're a Christian here this evening, if you're an agnostic or an atheist or a seeker or I'm not sure what I am but the biscuits and the coffee were nice last time, you know, Jesus is a fascinating figure.

[14:19] I wonder if you've ever wondered that if you were to, notice rather, if you were to make a list on the one, two lists even, on the one hand you were to write the names of the most influential people in history and on the other list you were to write the names of people who have claimed to be God.

Only one name would appear on both those lists and that would be the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is also widely respected. Even those, even people who attack Christianity with vigor and enthusiasm, there's often a begrudging acknowledgement that Jesus is worth some kind of respect. Christopher Hitchens, who I quoted earlier to you, actually that's not Christopher Hitchens, that's Jesus. Christopher Hitchens, who I quoted to you earlier, famously said, he said, I really admire the virtue of Jesus' teaching.

You know, even for an angry atheist like Christopher, there is something interesting, something enigmatic, something quite attractive, actually, about the Jesus who leaps off the pages of the New Testament if you're a searcher or a skeptic.

And that question of do all religions lead to God takes on special, sharp focus when you look at Jesus himself because it's not often noticed that Jesus said some pretty radical things.

[15:31] You know, many people want to label Jesus a wise man, a good teacher, a thoughtful teacher of ethics or morals, perhaps, or some such thing. And, you know, I often meet people who say, you know, Jesus was wonderful.

He told us that we should all love one another and get along, which is perhaps just the beginning of the story. But I always say, look, Jesus doesn't fit that model of good man very, very well. One of the most famous Christian writers of the last few years was C.S. Lewis, the famous Oxford atheist who became a Christian in his 30s and then wrote lots of interesting books thoughtfully exploring the Christian faith.

And in one of his most famous books, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis wrote this very famous little paragraph. He said, a man who is merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg or else you'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool. You could spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

[16:43] He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to. That's fairly strong language that Lewis is using there. What kind of things did Jesus say that Lewis might have had in mind when he wrote that paragraph?

Well, we read one of perhaps the most controversial things Jesus said in those six verses from John's Gospel that were read just before I came up to preach this evening. In John 14, verse 6, Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to God the Father except through me. And of course here, ladies and gentlemen, we hit the problem of exclusivity head on. You know, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And at first glance, that maybe to some of us this evening looks astonishingly arrogant. The way? The truth? The life? What about other ways? Wasn't Jesus sort of, you know, taking things just a little bit too far here?

What I want to do in my sort of remaining kind of 13 or 14 minutes is just unpack this statement a little bit and begin to understand why this claim that Jesus is the only way and uniquely the way among all the world's different faiths and religions and philosophies and claims of the truth, far from being incredibly arrogant is actually amazing in terms of what it reveals.

[18:03] Not so much about, not just about Jesus, but about God himself, who of course Jesus claimed to be not just a religious teacher, but God himself come to us in space and time and history and flesh.

But to see that, let's take the three little things that Jesus says here in this sentence very briefly one by one. Let's start with the first one. Jesus said, I am the way. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the only way in a world of other religions?

Well, let me make an observation here. It's been noted by anthropologists and those who study religious traditions that all the other religions of the world break down into one of three categories, one of three ways.

There are some religions that tell you the way to salvation or nirvana or a high state of human existence or paradise or heaven or Dundee, whatever it is you're looking for, can be found through knowledge, through mastering the right system of teaching.

Buddhism operates this way, for example. Then you have other religions that say, no, no, no, the way to that highest state of existence or paradise or heaven or wherever it is you're looking for is found through having the right mystical experience.

[19:10] And many Eastern religions operate that way. And then thirdly, there are religions that say, no, no, no, it's through keeping the right commandments. It's through doing the right thing. It's through action. It's through pragmatism.

And you do the right thing and that's how you achieve salvation. And all of the world's great faith traditions actually tend to fall into one of those three categories, knowledge, experience or action. There is one notable exception though that doesn't fit that grid very well. Because when you look at Jesus of Nazareth you discover Jesus didn't come claiming, hey, here's some wonderful new teaching. You should follow it.

He doesn't come claiming, hey, here's a wonderful new mystical experience. Why don't you have it? And he just saying he doesn't come he's saying, here's a wonderful new list of commandments. Why don't you keep them? It will be a good idea for you.

Rather, Jesus came claiming to reveal God himself. And that bold claim makes Jesus unique. In fact, it's been remarked that you could remove the founder of any other world or religion from history and that religion could still stand if the Buddha had never been born.

[20:09] You know, somebody else could have started the system of teaching known as Buddhism. And it would be basically the same but with a different name. I could have started the system of teaching known as Buddhism. The fourth old path and the eight noble truths or whatever.

And there'd be fat little statues of me in green jade all across Asia and it might be called Andeism. If Muhammad had never been born, Islam could have started with somebody else. The Quran could have been revealed through somebody else.

Muslim theology is very clear on this point. Muhammad was just a warner, just a human being, nothing special. But Jesus, on the other hand, because Christianity is not a system of teaching brought by Jesus or experience taught by him or new commands given by him because Christianity is Jesus Christ.

Take Christ out of Christian and all you are left with are the letters I, A, and N. And Ian cannot really help you. If your name is Ian here this evening, I do apologize for picking on you.

Christianity is Christ and that makes him unique. Well, the second thing that Jesus said, he said, I am the way. Jesus also went on and said, I am the truth.

[21 : 13] I am the truth was the second thing that Jesus said. And again, this sounds horribly arrogant in a world of other truth claims. How arrogant of Jesus to say, I am the truth.

But I wonder if you've noticed something. Every truth claim is exclusive. The moment you stand up and say anything, you're being exclusive. If you say two plus two is four, you are excluding the mathematically challenged.

Do you think it's some other answer? If you say that you believe Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland, you're excluding those of us who know that it's Dundee. And even if you say that all religions lead to God, you are excluding the person who says, no, no, no, just one religion leads to God.

The only way to avoid being exclusive is to zip your lip and say nothing. But notice something interesting. Jesus didn't say, I know the truth, but he said, I am the truth, which is a slightly different way of phrasing it and slightly unusual.

Now, the interesting thing is here is the Greek word used for truth in John 14, verse 6, translated with the English word truth in our English Bibles is the Greek word *aletheia*.

[22 : 21] And it literally means to reveal or to unhide. It means to take that which is hidden and sort of bring it out from the shadows into the light so we can see it and it's revealed.

So that naturally raises the question, okay, Jesus, you're the one who's un hiding things. What are you un hiding? What are you revealing? And I would say, as you read the Gospels, as you read the Gospel of John in more detail, there are two claims going on.

The first, I think, is that Jesus claims to reveal who God is. And if you read the rest of John chapter 14, go beyond verse 6, that was read to us so marvelously this evening, read further on and you see this is very clear.

Jesus says to his disciples, anyone who has seen me has seen God the Father. Jesus claims to reveal God to us. The New Testament says radically and amazingly, if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus Christ.

But there's also something a bit more uncomfortable going on in the Scriptures in that Jesus also claims to reveal who we are. Now, most of us, if we were honest with ourselves this evening, probably would find the idea of having the truth about who we really are revealed is something that would make us very uncomfortable.

[23 : 24] even the richest, most self-assured, most self-confident person you know, or maybe you are that person here this evening, has something in their past, in their background that you've said or done or that you hope would never be revealed in public, especially in this age of people discovering things you said on Twitter 10 years ago and then broadcasting them.

All of us, you know, have things in our past we'd rather stay there. And in fact, a thought experiment that a friend of mine who's an evangelist in the south of England likes to sort of tell to sort of reveal how much this is obvious when you think about it goes like this.

The story, the thought experiment goes imagine that after this evening service is over and you have another coffee and biscuit or two and you wander out into the Glasgow night air and you look the wrong way as you cross the main street out there and unfortunately you get flattened by a bus going past rather fast.

Sorry to sort of open up my illustration with depression this evening but I'm afraid bang, game over, you are dead. But the good news is you wake up in heaven and there you are at the pearly gates and you're met by an angel with a clipboard.

Actually possibly an iPad. This is the 21st century. And the angel says to you welcome to heaven. Oh we've been looking forward myself and the other angels. We've been looking forward to you

getting here for so long because boy do we have a special surprise for you this evening.
[24 : 37] And you say what's the surprise? And the angel says follow me, follow me. And the angel takes you by the arm and he leaves you into what appears to be a large screen cinema. It's completely empty just you and the angel and the cinema screen and the angel takes you to the front row of the cinema sits you down in the front row in front of the screen gives you a large bucket of popcorn and says welcome to the theatre of judgement.

The other angels and I have been looking forward to this for a long time and then he disappears in a puff of fairy dust or whatever angels disappear in. And lo and behold the movie starts on the screen and would you believe it it's the movie of your life.

Everything you've ever said thought, done, contemplated both in public and in private up there on the screen every last little detail all the best bits all the sordid bits bits that you want to clap with excitement bits that are so cringeworthily embarrassing you wish you could crawl under the seat in front of you but he's put you in the front row.

And after about two and a half hours of this you kind of scrape yourself off the floor and the angel reappears in a puff of fairy dust or whatever looks at you and says oh I do hope you enjoyed that myself and the other angels back in the editing suite we've been working for weeks on that and some of them are still in therapy but I've got some good news for you really good news I hope you enjoyed the movie here's the good news out in the lobby outside of the theater here we've got everyone else who appeared in that movie all of your friends all of your enemies even your dear old mum and dad your dear old grandmother I do hope she's got a pacemaker working this evening and we're going to bring them in and they're going to sit there and watch the movie of your life with you a second time what do you think?

how many of us would really actually want that experience? if we're honest all of us have bits of our lives that quite frankly we like to hide from ourselves let alone other people all of us have things in the darker corners of our hearts the shadows of our imagination things we've said thought or done or contemplated and we'd really rather stay there but Jesus doesn't let us get away with that he loves us too much to not tell us the truth about ourselves and Jesus says in the gospels that he's come to reveal who we really are and that can make us profoundly uncomfortable because before you can receive the cure you need the diagnosis but remember too what we read a few moments ago in John chapter 3 Jesus said God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him Jesus wants to bring us face to face with who we really are because that's important but so he can then offer the cure rather than leave us there in condemnation and that brings us finally to the last thing that Jesus said here in John 14 verse 6

[27 : 10] I am the way I am the truth and lastly said Jesus I am the life you know this is important to come into land here because Christianity is not about some massive guilt trip you know the Christians and the church sometimes giving people that impression that you know being a Christian is all about making people feel guilty and miserable and all this other kind of stuff and you know and then Christians sometimes sort of feeling they have the right to come across as being holier than thou you know being a Christian is not about being superior to those around you not by a long shot and if anyone's ever given you that impression of Christianity I can only but apologize rather Christianity is ultimately about a person Jesus Christ and the claim of Christianity uniquely this that the whole purpose of Jesus' ministry and life and death and resurrection was not some moral self-improvement program not some self-help program but was actually about transforming our very hearts that thing that we saw right at the beginning that all of us need because unless something radical is done to address the very heart of who we are our very identities no amount of self-improvement will ever work you know ultimately all of the world's religions are an attempt to answer a conundrum first identified or beautifully illustrated by the French philosopher

Blaise Pascal a few hundred years ago he said the problem with human beings is we can be beastly and we can be angelic we're noble and we're evil we're heroic and we're wretched we're capable of tremendous acts of good but also tremendous acts of evil the human race has produced Mother Teresa it's also produced Adolf Hitler and in fact that's too easy because actually even in our own lives we can manifest both those tendencies the problem is not that we don't know what is good either the problem for most of us is we know darn well what we should be doing but we don't do it anyway and as we saw earlier whether it's politics or money or science or technology or religion human beings have a tent of picking things up and using them for both good and for evil and the massive question I think confronting is ever more as a society and as individuals is how do

we deal with that dividing line that fracture that split in the in the human heart that dividing line between good and evil that runs through the middle of each one of us or what's interesting every religion out there more or less diagnoses the problem every religion out there says yep there's something wrong with human beings and then proceeds to go right the solution is rules and regulations do's and don'ts obey all these commandments do all this stuff stuff stuff stuff here's a great long list go away and keep it and maybe if you work hard enough you can climb climb climb up the ladder and through sheer effort just maybe crawl out of the swamp and the morass that the human race is in and reach god maybe but then you know maybe not because actually maybe you just haven't got the ability to do that in that sense all religions are the same because they offer the same solution to the basic problem but don't actually solve the problem in the first place

Christianity on the other on the other hand says there is nothing that you or I can do to fix the human heart the gospel says we've been trying as Christians we've been trying as human beings for millennia and it's gotten us nowhere we can't bridge that gap between us and god from our side because we are in too much of a mess but god can bridge it from his side hence that bible verse we saw earlier god so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life and the wonderful news my friends about jesus is that in jesus god has reached out to each one of us here no matter what your background no matter what your history no matter what your record no matter what you've done no matter how bad you are or no matter how self-righteous you think you might be god has reached out to each one of us to offer us the chance of real life and the challenge when it comes to Christianity is not whether you're clever enough or religious enough heaven forbid or holy enough or good enough or smart enough the only challenge really when it comes to Christianity is whether you're humble enough to admit that there's nothing that you or I can do from our side but rather we need to accept the offer that god gives us generously and wonderfully and kindly in jesus christ as c.s lewis who I quoted you a short while ago put it elsewhere he said jesus offers us offers us something for nothing he even offers us everything for nothing in a sense the whole christian life consists in responding to that very very remarkable offer that is what's unique about Christianity jesus is what's unique but one last thought in conclusion as we wrap this up you know one of the reasons why

I think so many people are attracted by pluralism are attracted by this tendency we want to say all religions are the same is because inherently we want to we want to love and respect and affirm other people and that's a wonderful motive but of course loving and respecting people doesn't mean thinking that everyone's ideas are equal you know it's people who are equal ideas are not and love for all love for those we disagree with love for even our enemies stands at the heart of the christian faith because the heart of christianity stands jesus and jesus is the great leveller you know other religions may fall by the wayside but other persons do not because all persons are equal and what makes us equal is that all people equally need jesus god god could have looked at us and left us where we were in our mess and our brokenness thankfully he didn't in jesus and jesus alone god reached out to us to offer us transformation and forgiveness and redemption and restoration and the offer of becoming part of god's family in and through what he did in the person of jesus that makes jesus unique he stands alone and if you haven't discovered or responding to that incredible invitation and gift that god offers us in jesus if you haven't yet discovered that for yourselves maybe tonight might be the moment where you for the first time in your life look at jesus and say okay lord i want to follow you i maybe can't figure everything out there are still parts of christianity that still don't make sense but jesus i want to follow you and discover what it means to know forgiveness and peace and reconciliation through what you did and if that's something you want to pursue do talk to myself or martin or one of the leaders here this evening and we'd love to pray with you afterwards thank you for listening so patient this evening may god bless you