

Is Jesus The Only Way To God

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Ian, for reading. And can I add my word of welcome? I'm Martin Ayers. I'm the senior minister here. And it's great to have you with us, especially if you're visiting and perhaps never been to church before.

It's a great joy to see you. And I'm going to speak now about this subject in our Big Question series, is Jesus the only way to God? We heard there a scene from John's gospel.

John wrote an account of Jesus' life in the first century. And he speaks, he tells us there what Jesus said to some of his disciples. So we'll look at that in a moment together. And on the back, you can see some points.

So I don't know where you went to school, what country it was, and what the kind of dogma was at school. But in my school, in the north of England, we used to have an assembly.

And I remember that sometimes the teachers would read the assemblies out of a book. And it meant you kind of started to notice which ones were regularly given to you.

[1 : 04] So there was one assembly we got several times. I remember the deputy head giving it once. He said there were some blind men in a room with an elephant. And the first one touches the elephant's leg and says, an elephant is like a tree trunk.

It's like a tree. And then the second blind man touches the tail and says, no, no, no, an elephant is like a rope. And the third one is holding the trunk of the tree.

Sorry, of the elephant. The trees don't have trunks. He's holding the trunk of the elephant and says, no, no, no, an elephant is like a snake. And then another one is holding the belly and says it's like a huge wall.

And another one is holding the tusk and says, no, an elephant is just like a solid pipe. And they all start fighting with each other because they're so strongly disagreeing.

And then a wise man walks by and explains, you're all right. It's just that all of you have grasped something. If only you could come together, you'd get the full picture.

[2 : 16] None of you has the whole truth. But you've all got something of the truth. The message I was being indoctrinated with at school was religions, they're like the blind men in the story.

Each of them is searching for the truth. Each religion has got some truth but only part of the picture. If only they'd understand that in humility and talk to each other, all the fighting would stop and they'd know better.

I find that as a minister, quite often actually, I'll have a conversation with someone where they'll say, I think the picture that helps me to think about your religion and other religions is that maybe they're like all different paths up the same mountain.

You might have heard that before. Maybe it's a way that you thought before. So the message is, it doesn't matter which path you choose, we all end up in the same place.

What those two stories, the elephant and the mountain, are portraying is a view that's sometimes called relativism. Relativism denies that we have access to objective truth, absolute truth, things that are true for all people at all time.

[3 : 41] Instead, relativism says, what you choose to believe is true for you. So when it comes to your religion, your life philosophy that you're going to live by, you don't ask, is this true in any kind of objective sense?

No, it's more like choosing an ice cream. Which flavor do you like best? Vanilla or strawberry? Fish food or cookie dough?

Don't worry what anyone else is doing. Don't judge anyone else for what they think. It's just a matter of opinion. But just look at that reading we had and I'm going to read again from the second paragraph.

It has a little number five there. Verse five. Thomas said to Jesus, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?

Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[4 : 56] He's not a way. He's the way. And you see how exclusive he is. No one, no one at all comes to God, his Father, except through him.

It's quite different, isn't it, to the blind man and the elephant? So I've got two concerns to raise about relativism for us to think about and then two claims of Jesus Christ.

So thinking about relativism first, two concerns. The first concern is relativism is contradictory.

There's just no doubt that the major world religions make claims that contradict each other.

But relativism says if you choose to believe one of those religions, it is true for you. But in what sense can they all be true?

Christianity says Jesus is divine. He is God in the flesh. He died on the cross. He rose from the dead and he ascended to heaven. That's the claim of the Christian faith. Islam says Jesus is not divine and he didn't die on the cross.

[6 : 12] Relativism says you're both right. But how? Jesus either died on the cross or he didn't.

Now the relativist might say at this point, you've just got one bit of the picture, one bit of the elephant. If only you could look at what other people have got, you'd find actually you're all talking about the same thing.

But at that point, relativism becomes condescending. It's asking you to believe something about all the different religions that none of those religions actually believes itself.

You have to trim away the fundamental beliefs of the different religions with the aim of making them say the same thing as each other. Now as I say that, there's a danger that in today's culture I sound intolerant.

And so it's important to think about tolerance just for a minute. What do we mean by tolerance? We have to distinguish between giving people the right to believe anything they want to believe.

[7 : 18] People have that right. That's one thing. It's another thing to say everybody is right. They're two completely different things. I find it helpful to distinguish between three types of tolerance.

There is legal tolerance that in the law of the land you don't make it illegal for people to believe something. There is social tolerance which is that way you might think well I believe one thing but I will not let that affect how I treat somebody else socially who believes something different to me.

I will socially tolerate them. I will be their friend. I will love them. But a third type of tolerance is intellectual tolerance where you might say I did believe one thing but because you believe something else I need to accept that you're right as well as me.

What you believe is just as true as what I believe. Now the value of tolerance in Britain today comes from a Christian worldview.

The reason why it's kind of a core British value is because we've inherited it from being built our foundation is being built on the Christian faith because Jesus expects people to have a choice as to whether you want to trust him.

[8 : 42] And so as a Christian I don't believe that anybody should be compelled by force or legislation or discrimination to become a Christian.

I don't think that would be right. So Christians should be legally tolerant and they should be socially tolerant. but what about intellectual tolerance?

If somebody wants to get to Gifnick from church and I'm talking to them and they say I said do you want to lift to Gifnick? It's quite dark and they say no it's alright I'll just go out to Great Western Road and I'll jump on the number 6 bus to get to Gifnick.

It doesn't matter what they believe about the number 6 bus and its route they're not going to get to Gifnick. They're going to go to Anisland because that's where the number 6 bus goes.

Now religion is a story that you tell yourself about ultimate reality. Is there a God? How many are there? What are they like? Or what is he or she like? These are questions with straightforward objective answers.

[9 : 49] They're the same kind of question as where will the number 6 bus get me to? It doesn't matter what you believe it won't change the truth. So when you put the different views of the different religions together and you try and harmonize them and say well they're all saying the same thing it's hopelessly contradictory.

That's my first concern. Second concern about relativism is relativism is arrogant. just think about the elephant all the blind men touching different parts.

Where is the relativist in the story? He's the only person who can see. Have a think about the mountain the Muslim the Buddhist the Christian the Hindu the Sikh all going up their little paths up the mountain.

Where's the relativist? the relativist is in a helicopter. He's the only person who can see all the paths.

He looks down and thinks if only you could all see what I can see you're all going to the same place. It's important to see that because it sounds very humble to be a relativist.

[11 : 13] It sounds humble to say you can't judge anybody else I think all religions are equally true I don't want to judge anybody I don't want to say anyone's wrong but it's actually a massive thing to say because what you're really saying is I can see what every world religion has failed to see about itself and about the others.

If only they could see things from my vantage point they'd realise they're all going to the same place. Now one principle that really helped me when I was thinking about the Christian faith is that you get presented with the Christian faith and who Jesus is and why he came and you might have doubts about that worldview that position of faith but it's important to think what are my doubts and if my doubts are true what position of faith is that?

Every doubt is a position of faith. Subject your doubts to the same kind of rigorous analysis as you are the Christian faith to see if it's true.

So just think if relativism is true so that Jesus isn't the only way to God what sort of a God is there for relativism to be true?

What is God like? Either there's no God or there is a God who really doesn't care what you believe about him or how you relate to him.

[12 : 46] But that's a very particular view of God isn't it? What evidence do you have Mr. Relativist for believing that God is like that? It's not what Buddha believed it's not what Jesus believed it's not what Muhammad believed why should I believe that that God is like that?

and relativism only tolerates you if you agree with it. So if you actually say to the relativist well actually I think Jesus is the only way to God and no one comes to God except by him the relativist will say you can't say that that's not allowed it's intolerant to say that so you can't say it and ironically that is an intolerant thing to say you see true tolerance says you and I believe very different things don't we?

We can bear with each other in that but let's also discuss that let's understand each other better let's even be open to changing our mind in the pursuit of truth but let's not kid ourselves that we're both right so those are my two concerns about relativism let's move on now to two claims from Jesus Christ the first is only in Jesus has God come to us in a person he says let me read it again I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me if you really know me you will know my father as well from now on you do know him and have seen him see what he's saying if you look at Jesus you are seeing God on earth and that is massive isn't it and I guess you'd need to examine the evidence for that to see whether you think that is true what Jesus said you could do that by coming to Life Explored in the new year

Sunday by Sunday here to look at the evidence for why Christians believe Jesus was correct in saying that but what's also clear is that if that's true Jesus brings the truth to all of us and in what Jesus said there he is different from every other religion in Islam Mohammed claims to have a revelation from Allah to write down in Sikhism you follow the teachings of Guru Nanak the first Sikh Guru but only Jesus claims don't look at my teaching look at me that he himself is the revelation of God he is God come to earth and that means that you can investigate him God has stepped into history in space and time once an early Christian the Apostle Paul first generation

Christian he was on trial and eyewitnesses of Jesus are still around and he says this at the trial it's in a book in the Bible in Acts he says I'm convinced that none of this has escaped your notice because it was not done in a corner see what he's saying this wasn't a secret thing who Jesus is it's not a private thing Jesus went about publicly he showed publicly that he could do things that only God can do Islam is different to that there are stories but there's no connection with our world that we can verify you can't corroborate it in fact there's a helpful little book called If I Were God I'd Make Myself Clearer it's by a writer called Joshua Harris and he starts with that objection well if I was God I'd make myself clearer and he looks at the different religions and he argues that he would expect if

there is a God that he would have signposts to who he is so that we wouldn't have to take a blind leap in the dark we'd have a way of working out what God is like and he looks at the different world religions and Joshua

[17 : 13] Harris argues in his book that there are only three world religions that are historically verifiable that actually make claims that you can see well they're about history did these things really happen and the three he mentions are Mormonism Judaism and Christianity he actually you need to read the book argues that Mormonism makes historical claims that you can more or less disprove when you look at what Mormonism claims about the history of America the fact that there is no evidence for what is said when there would need to be kind of allows you rule out Mormonism Judaism and Christianity make claims about history and especially when you look at the Christian faith focused on Jesus being God stepping into our world and so you can look at that and you can think does Jesus' life his teaching his works his character the claims by people who saw him that he did miracles the impact that he had do these match the claim that Christians are making that this was God in the flesh and life explored would be a way to do that in the new year to find out about this

God who has come into our world if Jesus is not God ignore him have nothing to do with him but if he is then he can tell us what's true not just for you but for everyone there's another claim of Jesus that makes Christianity unique and that is that only in Jesus has God died for us if you think about what a religion is all religions tell you a story in fact every world view tells you a story and the story will tell you who am I what is humanity what's wrong with the world and what's the solution and religions that say there is a higher power or a God of some kind almost always say we have to do something to be accepted by that

God it might be that we have to turn to the five pillars of Islam so that Allah will be pleased with us and have mercy on us on judgment day or that we practice Buddhism to achieve Nirvana or we obey the spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak in Sikhism so that the God that Sikhs believe in would accept you if you like they're all paths up a mountain when you look at what they say is at the top of the mountain they've got to be different mountains but the picture doesn't really work but just work with the picture of the idea that they're all paths up a mountain they're all about humankind trying to make our way upwards through religious practice but Jesus Christ is completely different to that the Christian faith says that the offense we have committed against God by the way we treated him and the ways we treated other people is too great for us to make our way back to him we could never make our way to

God he is too pure and good for that Jesus said in that room let me read verses 2 and 3 again he said my father's house has many rooms if that were not so would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am Jesus is saying he can get us to God he has come to get us if you think about the mountain we're not on our way up the mountain we're stuck in a ravine and we can't get out we're helpless and then the mountain rescue team arrives and a man drops down and says I've come to get you out take hold of me

I've got the robe and I'll get us out of here it's a rescue operation we don't have time tonight to talk through how Jesus does that but briefly he does that by dying for us by dying in our place he deals with our mess our mistakes our wrongdoing the wrong ways we treated God and other people so that we can be rescued and brought back to God one of the reasons that as a Christian I'm confident that there is no other way to God is that it cost Jesus so much to get us to God he had to die for us and the night before he died the gospels tell us the accounts of Jesus life that he prayed to God if there is any other way please take this mission from me if there is any other way and he had to go and die because there was no other way you could sum up all religions with the word do here is what you must do the message of

[22 : 40] Christianity can be summed up with the word done it's all been done by Jesus and it's wonderful he offers you a place with God he offers you a rescue and he offers that to us today you could accept it and right away you would be in a right relationship with God not working your way up a mountain you can know him as your father a relationship that Jesus says is like coming home it would mean certainly all sorts of changes in your life certainly but none of that change gets you to God Jesus has done that for us it's an exclusive claim Jesus is making isn't he no one comes to the father except through me but can you also see how in another sense it's a very inclusive claim it means that whatever you've done whoever you've become whatever your parents believe whatever

your background whatever you've believed before you can know

God and go to heaven if you just turn back to God through Jesus anyone can I'm going to end my talk with a prayer and it's a prayer that you would allow you to do that to turn back to God a good number of you here tonight may well feel it wouldn't be right for you to pray that prayer perhaps you disagree with what I've said perhaps you just don't know enough yet and you want to investigate more that's great but I'm going to say a prayer that says to God sorry for the way I've lived before the things I've done wrong thank you that Jesus has come to rescue me I accept that gift please forgive me and help me to live for you from now on so let's have a moment of quiet I'll say the prayer and if you want to say it for yourself you just say the words in your own mind to God heavenly father I recognize that

I have wandered away from you and become lost I cannot find my way back to you on my own I don't deserve to be with you because of how I've treated you and other people thank you that in Jesus you stepped into our world so that I could know the truth about you thank you that in him you died for me so that he could rescue me and bring me back to you I now accept that gift please send your spirit into my life to help me to live for you from now on showing others the way to know you amen you so you I I

I know all you I