

**“IS JEUS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD?”
Matthew 11:2-6**

I have a cartoon where one guy says to another: “There are only two possible options. If evolution is wrong, the Christian God created everything in the universe as-is.” His friend says, “What about the Hindu gods?” and he responds, “There are only 3 possible options...” Maybe it wouldn’t be so tough if we only had 3 choices. Actually, “according to David Barrett and the editors of the [World Christian Encyclopedia](#),” there are 19 major world religions which are subdivided into a total of 270 large religious groups, and many smaller ones. 34,000 separate Christian groups have been identified in the world. ”

Just cutting out the 34,000 Christian denominations, and looking at the 270 divisions of the 19 world religions, how do we know which one is the right one? Do we pick a religion, like we pick a toothpaste? Any will do fine? Do we just stick with the religion we grew up in, because it’s as good as anything else? Maybe we should just pick out parts of each religion we like, cafeteria style. “I think I’ll have a scoop of Buddhist, a pinch of Islam and a little Jesus on the side.” I can pretty much guarantee if you do this in attempt to be “tolerant” to make all religious groups happy, you will certainly make all of them mad. And as for you, you’ll be more messed up than you were before.

Some say “there are many ways to God,” but then you have to decide “which god?” Hinduism alone has 330 million gods. Some religions don’t even believe in God as a personal being – just an impersonal force. Most religions don’t believe the same things. They certainly don’t teach the same thing, although there are some core teachings that can be practiced without God even being a part of it. Most of the time when people say, “there are many ways to god,” they have no idea what any of the religions believe, they are just saying that to be accepting or tolerant of others – which is very polite, but not very helpful.

What was it like in Jesus’ time? The Romans had their pantheon of gods and so did the Greeks. The Egyptians had their gods – remember the golden calf fiasco? And then there were the Canaanite religions in the Promised Land with their group of gods, like Baal and Ashera, Chemosh and Dagon that occasionally demanded human sacrifice. Is human sacrifice one of the ways to God? (I guess it is if you’re the sacrifice!) All of these religions are gone now.

And now we know about even more cultures and religions worldwide. Do I include Buddhism and study the 8 fold path to enlightenment that believes that we can become gods, ourselves, or enlightened beings like Buddha? (Maybe I can just take a 3 fold path!) Do I go to Islam and follow Allah through his prophet Mohammed? Can I just practice 2 of the 5 Pillars of Islam? They believe in Jesus as a prophet, but not as the Son of God who died for my sins and was resurrected – is that OK? Or maybe I can practice a little Hinduism and worship the many incarnations of Brahman, to where I am reincarnated through enough lifetimes to where my karma allows me to go to Nirana where I simply blend in with Brahman? Or maybe I will buy a prayer shawl, a yamaka – skull cap, and a Tanak and if I just keep 8 of the 10 commandments, I can get by. (Actually, if I included any of these other religions, I couldn’t keep the first

commandment where God says, "You shall worship no other gods before me.") Or can I believe that Jesus was a great teacher, and as long as I follow the Golden Rule, go to church once in a while and try to live a good life, that will be enough.

Jesus knew of all the different gods and ideas about God that were out there. In fact, He took His disciples north on a retreat at a place called Caesarea Philippi, where one of the four branches that form the Jordan River emerges from a cave. In the cliff face walls around the cave were little shrines to the Roman god, Pan. A temple to the Greek god, Zeus, was also there. Herod the Great even built a small temple for Caesar worship of Caesar Augustus. It was there that Jesus asks a couple of questions of His disciples:

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

- Matthew 16:13-16

That's coming from one of His closest friends, who is also a monotheistic Jew. Jesus really had to be something for Peter to say such a powerful statement about Him.

When we read the New Testament, especially the Gospels, Jesus says the most brash, divisive, intolerant statement I have ever heard. In John 14:6 He says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." How do we believe that in this day and age of religious tolerance, pluralism, accepting each other's differences, if we are going to be religiously and culturally sensitive? We don't want to appear close minded or narrow minded. But what if Jesus really IS the only way to God? Maybe Jesus was not being brash – maybe He was just being honest.

In Matthew 11, John the Baptist is in prison and he sends his disciples to ask an odd question: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Why was John unsure if Jesus was the Messiah, "the one who is to come?" Just a year or so earlier he pointed Jesus out to his own disciples, Andrew and John, and called Jesus, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." And remember how Jesus said of Himself in Luke 4 as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah:

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,

¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." - Luke 4:16-21

Why would John send some of his disciples to ask Jesus such an odd question? I read recently that John might have asked that question because at the time he was stuck in prison. "So what about the part of 'releasing the captives from prison?' When am I

going to get out of here? I can hear the executioner sharpening his ax – hurry up!” I think it was more about the question: “Did I fulfill God’s purpose or waste my life?”

But Jesus tells John’s disciples:

“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ⁶Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” Matthew 11:4-6

Jesus’ claims are not just promises and empty words – He backs them up by what He does. Jesus Christ stands alone among the founders of all other religions in the claims that He made about Himself, and how events unfolded to fulfill those claims. Those who wrote the Gospels say they have only told what they saw and heard. Jesus is the only one who predicted His own death, the way He would die, and that He would rise from the dead – and then did it. Some of the other religions see Him as a great prophet, a great teacher, a guru, a spiritual master – but none of them see Him as the unique, divine Son of the Living God who literally died and rose from the dead. I do believe this. I disagree with those who don’t, because I have seen, heard and experienced the reality of Jesus in my life today.

As I was looking at what many other religions believe about the way to God, every one of them seemed to say, the harder you work at their particular religious practices, the closer you will be to God. The difference between other religions and the Judeo-Christian faith is that, according to the Bible, God made the first move to draw near to us. From the beginning He sought us out. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves – He offers forgiveness of sin, and eternal life as a gift of unearned, unmerited grace for all who will receive it by faith and follow Christ. No other religion offers such a relationship with the living Person of God. Now here’s a warning: even in the Christian religion, you can chose Christianity - a religion of good works and trying to be a good enough person to earn your own way to God. But that is not true Christianity, which is a living relationship with our Living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Some will say, “What about my friends who are in different religions? How can I say they are “wrong,” when they are such good people? Isn’t it narrow minded of us? Isn’t it intolerant of us?” You can love your friends of different religions and backgrounds and still disagree with them. I believe you can be tolerant and respectful of other people’s religion, worship differently from them, and still have them as friends or family members. If anything we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, as Jesus said.

But another question is: “If you believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father, are we saying that everyone else who doesn’t believe in Jesus is going to Hell?” Here’s my answer: “I am in sales, not in management.” I don’t mean it to sound like a cop out of avoiding the question. It’s just that I trust God absolutely with things I don’t understand. I believe God will do what is fair and right towards kind, moral and good people, because I trust Him. My job is to proclaim Jesus Christ and let Him show Himself through me - to love others unconditionally and to serve the world.

In Joshua 24:15, Joshua said this to the people of Israel before they entered the land of Canaan that was full of foreign gods: “¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Every one of us has a choice about Jesus Christ. Is He the only, unique, human and divine, Son of the Living God who died on the cross for the sins of the world, and rose again to live and reign forever at the right hand of God the Father almighty? Out of all the claims of other religions and spiritual leaders of the world, do I believe Jesus is the only way to the Father? It’s your choice, as to what you believe.

I don’t know about you, but I have made my choice – no apologies, no regrets. I am not a Hindu. I am not a Muslim. I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, who has been saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ through faith, and not that of myself, so that I cannot boast. I don’t want to be some kind of watered-down mutation/hybrid of a Christian with a cafeteria style religion. I want to be the real thing, authentic, washed in the blood of the Lamb, saved, redeemed, child of the living God, sold out 100% all or nothing Christian. I believe what Jesus said, when He said that no one comes to the Father except through Him. That is my choice, my belief, and I’m betting my life on it.