

Finding Solid Ground

Bethel Community Church *Sermon Series*

Sunday 27th March 2004 (Sermon 8)

Pastor Steve Jones

One Faith- *Christianity Compared*

Prayer

Have you ever been with someone in the last moments before they die? At that moment the mystery of a life lived becomes suddenly clear. You see in relief those things that matter and those things that don't. At that point, everyone's question is the same; what's next?

Your answer to that question depends upon the worldview that you subscribe to. Do you believe that you will be subsumed into the great consciousness, will you be on your way to nirvana, will there be just nothing or will you meet the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to look today at the worldviews of the major world religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, the New Age Movement, and Atheism. How does Jesus Christ stand up against His challengers?

Islam

At 20% of the earth's population, Islam is the largest world faith after Christianity. Muhammad founded Islam in A.D. 570. In 610, at the age of 40, Mohammad stated that, whilst on a spiritual retreat, he received a number of revelations from the angel Gabriel. These revelations were collected in a book called the Qur'an, now Islam's doctrinal book. When Muhammad initially received these revelations he doubted their origin, thinking that he was possessed by demons. His wife persuaded Muhammad of the truth of these revelations, and encouraged him to preach them. He did start to preach, upsetting the religious leaders of his day who practiced worshipping many, and not just one, God. Many people immediately gravitated to this new religion and it grew quickly. Mohammed died on June 8, A.D. 632.

Central Beliefs

God God is one, with no partners. Thus, the Trinity is offensive to Muslims.

Angels There is a hierarchy of angels between God and man. Each person has two angels, one to record good deeds, and one to record bad deeds.

- Prophets* God has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the message that there is only one God. In all, 124,000 prophets have been sent. The prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus.
- Books* Four of the highest-ranking prophets, says the Qur'an, were given divine revelation in book form. Moses (the Torah), David (the Psalms), Jesus (the Gospel) and Muhammad (the Qur'an). Muslims believe that only the Qur'an has been preserved in an uncorrupted state.
- Judgment* There will be a Day of Judgment when your good deeds, says the Qur'an, will be weighed against your bad deeds. If the good outweigh the bad, then you go to Paradise; if bad outweigh the good, you go to hell.
- Nature* Everyone is good by nature. This contrasts with Christianity, which teaches that all are sinful by nature.
- Jesus* Only a prophet, says the Qur'an. To call Jesus the Son of God is to commit blasphemy to a Muslim. Interestingly Muslims affirm the virgin birth of Jesus and the fact that He performed miracles.
- Crucifixion* According to Muslims Jesus did not die on the cross. They believe that Judas died in Jesus' place on the cross.

Summary

If you are a Muslim, you can work your way to Paradise, but you have no way of knowing until Judgment whether you have done enough to get to Paradise.

Hinduism

About 13% of the world's population is Hindu. The vast majority of Hindus, some 700 million, live in India, where they account for 82% of the population. There are more than 1 million Hindus in the US. Hinduism started around 1500 B.C. as a polytheistic (many gods) and ritualistic religion. As the rituals became more complex, priests were trained to perform the rituals correctly. The *Vedas* are the written instructions to the priests as to how the rituals are to be performed. Around 600 B.C. there was a revolt against the power of the priests. This revolt changed the focus of worship from external ritual to internal meditation. Between 800 and 300 B.C. the *Upanishads* (Hindu version of the New Testament) were written. These writings propounded the view that behind the many Hindu gods was one Reality, called *Brahman*. *Brahman* is considered an impersonal, monistic ("all is one") force. The personified form of *Brahman* is said to be called *Ishvara*. There were many different incarnations of *Ishvara*; some of the most well known in the West would be *Vishnu*, *Rama* and *Krishna*. Hinduism has over 330 million different gods.

Central Beliefs

God	Impersonal.
Man	An extended part of the Oneness of the supreme Reality.
Death	Reincarnation many times. Karma is the equivalent to the natural law of cause and effect (we reap what we sow). We reap in this lifetime the consequences of deeds committed in previous lifetimes. In future lives, man could be born as human, animal or insect.
Humanity's Problem	Ignorance or lack of enlightenment.
The Solution	Liberation from ignorance and illusion.
The Means	Attain unity with divine through self-effort. Three paths to enlightenment; the way of action and ritual; the way of knowledge and meditation; the way of devotion.
The Outcome	Merge into the Oneness. When you attain enlightenment, you are no longer reincarnated and forever become part of the great Self.

Summary

There are many ways to the Supreme One (this is where the pantheistic phrase “there are many ways to God, my way is as valid as yours”, comes from). Use whatever works for you to achieve divinity by your own effort. We are all extensions of the great Self or God!

Buddhism

Around 6% of the world's population is Buddhist, although Buddhist teachings have impregnated themselves into many areas of Western New Age beliefs. Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism during the sixth century B.C. His life (563 -483 B.C.) coincides with the time when the people of Judah were exiled in Babylon. *Gautama* was born and raised in a warrior class family in Northeastern India. He lived in the palace and his father sought to shelter him from the hardships and sufferings of life. One day, it is said, he left the palace and saw what life was really like. He was so affected that he left his wife and family and home and went in search of the answer to suffering. For 6 years he put himself through extreme asceticism, in the hope of finding enlightenment. After almost drowning, he gave that way up as a failure. On reaching the city of Bodh Gaya, *Gautama* sat under a fig tree and determined not to rise again until he had attained enlightenment. It is said that he sat there for a long time and achieved enlightenment,

becoming *Buddha* (which means “enlightened one”). *Buddha* then traveled far and wide preaching his message. He died, probably of food poisoning, after 45 years of preaching. There are many varied forms of Buddhism, resulting from continual splits in the religion over the centuries.

Central Beliefs

Suffering	Life consists of suffering.
The World	Everything is impermanent and ever changing. We suffer because we desire things that are ever changing.
Liberation	The way to eliminate suffering is to attain a state of desirelessness for anything in the world.
Attainment	Desire can be eliminated by: Right Understanding; Right Thought; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Livelihood; Right Effort; Right Awareness; Right Meditation.
Humanity	An imperfect collection of items of no value.
Nirvana	The highest level of attainment. An abstract void. Nothing there.
The Way There	Within. Self-reliance.

Summary

Buddhists believe that there are many paths to God. The path is within you. This life is an illusion and the Reality lies behind it. Use whatever path works for you. God is of no relevance to Buddhists.

New Age

The New Age Movement is named after the so-called *new Aquarian Age* (21st Century →) that has replaced the old or *Pisces Age* (1 – 2000 AD). In reality the New Age Movement is a veritable smorgasbord of beliefs and practices, from which participants pick and choose what they like to enable them to obtain “oneness with the Universal Self” or “Cosmic Mind”. When a New Ager talks of God, they do not mean God in a Judeo-Christian sense where there is a personal, holy being who has existed before all things and is separate from all things. The New Ager is talking of an “impersonal goodness”. They believe that all things are God, and we are mere extensions of the divine oneness expressed in nature. New Agers include devotees of all backgrounds Hindus, Buddhists, Wiccans, UFO believers, astrologers, channelers and parapsychologists, to name but a few. Satan and his occult web are close bedfellows with the New Age Movement. The Wiccan (Witchcraft) movement is unashamed about its occult nature.

Central Beliefs

God	Impersonal. The life force behind nature.
Humans	Divine in themselves. "We are all gods!"
Salvation	Connection with the divine oneness.
Death	Spiritual progression for attaining enlightenment.

Summary

Anything goes as long as it makes you feel good.

Atheism

To the atheist there is no God, no heaven or hell, no judgment to come, no spiritual realm. All there is is what you see. When you die there is nothingness. The atheist slogan is "Life is hard, then you die".

Christianity

Christianity is the largest faith group in the world. The essence of the Christian message is that humankind is inherently sinful, and thus separated from God. There is no way for mankind to restore its relationship with God. God, who is holy, who loves mankind, who is omnipotent and omnipresent, sent His son Jesus Christ to earth by virgin birth as fully man and fully God, to restore mankind to himself by Jesus' atoning death on the Cross. Jesus paid the price that was due from mankind as a result of sin. Jesus defeated death and rose again unto life. Thereafter, anyone who repents of their sins and submits to Jesus Christ's Lordship in their life is restored to God and receives eternal life in heaven.

The Final Moments of Your Life

In the final moments of your life, in a car wreck, a hospital bed, a plane crash, or a fire in your workplace, of what will you be sure? Will you suddenly realize that you have missed the entire point your whole life. I don't believe in atheist thought in the last moments before death. Then your only thoughts, if you have the privilege of any, will be "I hope there is a God and I hope I am going to heaven" or "I know there is a God and I know that I am going to heaven". So will you know?

In this series we have discovered that the Bible is complete, accurate, divine, unchanging and enduring. The theme of the entire Bible is Jesus Christ. There are certain facts about Jesus Christ that confirm to us without doubt that Jesus is unlike any other spiritual leader the world has ever known.

1. Jesus Christ is the **only** spiritual leader the world has ever seen who claimed to be divine.
2. Jesus Christ is the **only** spiritual leader the world has ever seen whose purity or integrity remains challenged.
3. Jesus Christ is the **only** spiritual leader the world has ever seen whose birth must have been as a result of an act of God.
4. Jesus Christ is the **only** spiritual leader the world has ever seen whose message has invited and withstood all of the criticism thrown at it.
5. Jesus Christ is the **only** spiritual leader the world has ever seen who started with the answer.
6. Jesus Christ is the **only** spiritual leader the world has ever seen that the grave couldn't hold.

In short there is only one who has ever walked the face of earth and who is worthy of our trust and faith. The very word faith was crafted solely for one person: Jesus Christ.

When we look at the claim that Jesus was God walking amongst men, objectively, the evidence of the divine is overwhelming. When we look objectively at the evidence for any of the other major world religions what do we find. Nothing. There is nothing there. It is the Emperor's new clothes. Man has again and again created God in his own image. By the very nature of man's weakness and failings, our hope eternal has to be something beyond ourselves. Every other world religion, except Christianity, fails under objective rational criticism. In the final moments of life, which is the true testing ground of faith, I wonder in what you put your trust.

Turn to Acts 4:1-12 [ESV Church 1098 Compact 912]. Peter, before the Sanhedrin, was speaking to people for whom names had very great significance. The name of a person was seen as the source of power and authority - "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6); "By what power or by what name did you do this?"; "In His name the nations will put their hope" (Matthew 12:21). Peter was saying that the only name the world has ever known and will ever know that has **power** to save is Jesus Christ.

In those final moments, if your trust is in anything else, crystals, the great self, mother earth or good works, you will be enjoying your last seconds of life prior to falling on the long drop into the eternal pit of hell.

Choose your door to the future, before your future chooses you.

Pastor Steve Jones
Bethel Community Church
Dawlish
Devon

27th March 2004.