



from the desk of . . .

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DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO HEAVEN?

Philippians 2:7-11

I've been joking with the Deacons the past couple of weeks over the kind "S-H-E-P-H-E-R-D" picture (picture) they gave me for Pastor's Appreciation Month. The joke deals with finding a place to hang it in my office! ... Which I have, by the way. But in all seriousness, this gift means a great deal to me. Thank you.

But it's not just the walls of my office that are covered with meaningful mementos; I also have numerous knick-knacks sitting on the shelves. (award) This was a gift given to me by the city of Rolling Meadows for my involvement in their bicentennial celebration.

I appreciated the honor & enjoyed working with the other 7 members on that committee.

Now throughout my ministry I've always tried to take advantage of opportunities to be involved in civic events. I believe that it's important that I, representing C.C.R.M., connect with things in our community.

In addition, it gives me a chance to be with some non-churched people.

In that regard, I developed a relationship with one of the ladies on that committee, & we had several extended discussions about things of faith.

(I bring this up now because it's typical of a # of conversations I've had over the years.)

This lady said that she "liked" Jesus, & the things that He taught, & she wished that everyone could be as loving & tolerant as He was. (Now I believe a lot of people "like" Jesus. Jesus' compassion is popular today ... but most people don't take Him very seriously.)

Her problem, she went on to say, was with evangelical Christians in general, & I suspect, me in particular, & our unwillingness to accept other religions, or our general intolerance of them.

Well, this morning I want to talk to you about this "intolerance" issue that's leveled at Christians who do take Jesus seriously. And I want to clarify the radical claims that Jesus made about Himself that causes this concern. And then I want to explain in very precise terms why Jesus is the only way of salvation ... & why we must take His "controversial" claims passionately.

This is absolutely imperative for all of us to understand.

So, listen now to Good News from Paul to the Church in Philippi, & to the Church here in Rolling Meadows.

Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

Of his own free will he gave up all he had,
and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being
and appeared in human likeness.

He was humble and walked the path of obedience
all the way to death - his death on the cross.

For this reason God raised him
to the highest place above and gave him the name
that is greater than any other name.

And so, in honor of the name of Jesus
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below
will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:7-11)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the
mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing
devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

Let me say right here at the beginning, so there's no
question about it, I completely reject the idea that ...

- all religions are equally legitimate ways to God
- all religions are equally true, &
- all religions teach basically the same thing

Now I realize when I say that that there will be people
who call me intolerant, narrow-minded, & bigoted.

But here's my argument, & I want you to think this through with me. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. (John 4:26) He either was the Messiah or He wasn't the Messiah. (That's pretty straight forward isn't it? He was or He wasn't.) Now if He wasn't the Messiah, the Jews are right, & Christians are wrong. If He was the Messiah, Christians are right & the Jews are wrong.

But under no circumstances can they both be right!

If God exists, (& I guess that's open to debate), He's either a personal God, or He's an impersonal God. If He's a personal God, then the Muslims, Jews, & Christians are right & the Hindu's & Buddhists are wrong. If He's an impersonal God, then the Hindu's & Buddhists are right, & the Muslims, Jews, & Christians are wrong.

But under no circumstances can they all be right!

When we die, we either go to Heaven or Hell; we get reincarnated; or we lie in the grave forever & ever ...

but we can't do them all at the same time!

These things are obvious, right? ... And you see the problem here. Religions have totally **contradictory** truth claims. We're not arguing about how many angels can dance on the tip of a pin. These are issues that are foundational to what each believe.

And they are completely different views!

And, no matter what anyone might say ... they're not all about love. That's not even true about Christianity.

I remember having a conversation once with a man who "liked" Jesus, but he just didn't believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.

I pointed out to him that if Jesus wasn't **raised from the dead**, if He wasn't who He **claimed to be**, then what He said He came to do **He didn't do**.

Jesus stated that He came to forgive sins. "My blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28) And this "forgiveness of sins" was secured on the cross, & finalized by His resurrection. (1 Peter 1:3)

So much so that the Apostle Paul would write ...

"If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is a delusion & you are still lost in your sins. ... If our hope in Christ is good for this life only & no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else in all the world."

(1 Corinthians 15:17,19)

Paul said that people should actually "pity" us if we believe in Jesus contrary to fact.

If we just have these sweet emotional feelings about Jesus, if we simply envision the Jesus of **love**, but don't talk about the Jesus who **died** on the **cross**, & **walked out** of the **grave** ... then we're wasting our time.

We need to take Him seriously ... but there's an obstacle to that on the issue of Jesus being "the only way to get to Heaven."

Now when somebody tells me that I'm intolerant I always ask them the same question ... & this should be your question as well. "What do you mean by that?" ...

Now I know exactly what they mean, but I want them to say it out loud; I want them to mouth these ideas that are going around in their mind.

Their response is ... "well, you think you're right, & everybody else is wrong."

To which I respond ... "Yes, I do." ... Now I could be mistaken about this, but the reason I think the things I do is because I think they're right.

People **believe** the things they **believe** because they **believe** the things they **believe** are true. If they didn't believe they were true they wouldn't believe what they believe, they'd believe something else.

Now this isn't just true about me; it's true about them, too. So, here's how the conversation goes ...

"You're intolerant."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You think you're right."

"I do think I'm right, but let me ask you a question, do you think you're right?"

"Yes."

So, then I ask ... "Something about this bothers me," (I sound like Lt. Columbo), "why is it when I think I'm right, I'm intolerant. And when you think you're right ... you're just right? What am I missing here?" ...

The fact is ... I'm missing nothing.

Now I understand that when people hear Christians say that Jesus is "the only way" that this is deeply offensive. And, I'm very sympathetic to that. In fact, I wish it wasn't the case. My life, & I suspect yours, would be a lot easier. It'd be so much simpler to tell people ...

"Okay, if you want to believe in Jesus fine.
If you want to believe in Buddha, whatever ...
just be loving & everybody will get there."

The problem is, I'm a follower of Jesus ... & Jesus didn't say that. And I take Jesus seriously. That means that I am obliged to tell others the same thing that Jesus said about this issue. And that is that life in **Heaven** is only **available** through Him.

Now this was the main problem back in the 1st century as well. In fact, it was Jesus' true **identity** that ultimately led to His crucifixion.

It wasn't Jesus' teaching. Truth be told, much of what He taught came right out of the O.T. It wasn't particularly profound, other than it came from Jesus.

It wasn't Jesus' teachings ... it was Jesus.

We can take Buddha out of Buddhism, & we still have the teachings of Buddha. We can take Mohammad out of Islam, & we still have the teachings of Mohammad & the Koran. Their religions stay intact.

We take **Jesus** out of **Christianity** & **it's gone**. Please understand, Jesus was crucified, not for what He **taught**, but because of who He said **He was**.

When He was on trial, the Scriptures tell us that ...

"the chief priests & the whole Council tried to find some false evidence against Jesus to put him to death; but they could not find any." (Matthew 26:59-60)

Then "the High Priest spoke to him, 'In the name of the living God I now put you under oath: tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God?'" (Matthew 26:63)

(And to claim to be the Son of God is a claim to deity.)

"Jesus answered him, 'So you say.' ... At this the High Priest tore his clothes & said, 'Blasphemy!' ... 'He is guilty & must die.'" (Matthew 26:64-66) In other words, Jesus was put to death, not for anything that He taught.

Not for anything that He did.

Jesus was put to death for who He said He was.

And that is the most critical question any of us will ever have to answer. And make no mistake about it, every person who has ever lived, & is alive today, will have to come face-to-face with this. (Philippians 2:10-11)

Jesus asked His disciples ... "Who do you say I am?"

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'" And notice that Jesus didn't rebuke him. He didn't say, "Shame on you Peter, for making such a blasphemous claim. Go wash your mouth out with soap; that was so incredibly irreverent."

No, listen to His response. "Good for you, Simon son of John!" (Matthew 16:15-17) You are absolutely right!

You see, this puts the issue in an entirely different perspective. Because this idea of Jesus being "the only way" is not just what a bunch of narrow-minded, arrogant, snotty, pompous Christians dreamed up to annoy everyone else.

It's what Jesus Himself said from the beginning.

And not only did Jesus say it, but He was being a good Jew. The 1st Commandment is what? ...

"I am the LORD your God ... worship no god but me."

(Exodus 20:2-3)

In other words, God Himself was "narrow" back when He gave the Commandments to Moses ... "worship no god but me" ... & Jesus was following in the same tradition.

(X) Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, & the life; no one goes to the Father except by me."

(John 14:6)

And this theological truth remained with Peter throughout the rest of his life.

On one particular occasion, not long after Pentecost, Peter & John were arrested for preaching the Good News. The next morning, they were brought before the Jewish leaders, the elders, & the teachers of the Law, & Peter, "full of the Holy Spirit" boldly told them ... (X)

"Salvation is to be found through Jesus alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us." (The Acts 4:3,5,8,12)

So, given the fact that Scripture is thick with these kinds of statements, & Jesus Himself was constantly making reference to such a thing, we have a very simple question to ask if we're taking Jesus seriously ... was He wrong, or was He right?

That's the issue isn't it? ... Now this has been debated over the years & some people remark ...

"Well, I don't know how we can really know."

Well, there aren't too many options. He either was wrong or He was right. And if He was wrong, He either knew He was wrong, or He didn't know He was wrong. In other words, He was wrong & knew it. Or He was wrong & didn't know it. Or He was right. I don't know of any other options here, given His claims.

So, let's look at each of them carefully.

Was Jesus wrong & He knew He was wrong? ... Well, if someone knows they're wrong about what they say & continue to say it, what do we call that person? ... (a liar)

That's kind of odd isn't it? We look at the kinds of claims that Jesus made, & the way He lived His life, & the good things that He did, & the incredible respect that everybody seems to have for Him ... & then we have to conclude, in regards to the central claim of His life, that He was actually lying.

Here He was, asking for people's complete devotion, telling them that they should go to their death rather than deny His name. (The Revelation 2:10) And while He was asking for that kind of commitment ...

He was lying to them about His true identity.

Do you think that's reasonable, based on what we know about Jesus, that He was actually deceiving people about this? ...

Or maybe Jesus was mistaken; maybe He really thought He was God. He really pictured Himself as the Savior of the world. He really imagined that if we believed in Him we'd live, even if we died. He really dreamed that He was the resurrection & the life, & the living water, the bread of life, the gate into Heaven, & the Alpha & Omega.

Jesus simply assumed that He was the promised Messiah.

Now what do you make of a man who says this kind of stuff, & really believes it. "Before Abraham was born, 'I Am.'" (John 8:58) Anybody who thinks they're God, & isn't, is not sane. Is that fair to say? ... He's a lot nuts.

So, knowing what we know about the historical record, is it fair to say that Jesus was a few cards shy of a full deck, that He was crazy? ...

Here's a man who was constantly moving toward reality, not away from it. This is the kind of person we look to as a model when things get tough for us.

And if this guy was nuts ... where does that leave you & me? Does His deception sound reasonable? ... It doesn't to me. And it certainly isn't consistent with the idea that people think Jesus was a great man.

No, I don't think He was crazy, & I don't think He was lying. Well, if He wasn't lying & He wasn't crazy, guess what? ... We have one alternative left. Jesus was telling the truth about everything ... including this issue. And He proved it by predicting His own death, & His resurrection. (Matthew 16:21) Jesus conquered death, & then evidenced it by appearing to over 500 people.

(1 Corinthians 15:6)

Now this was a man with credibility, which is precisely why people liked Him. And it's for those reasons that we should take everything He says seriously.

Jesus said ... "All others who came before me are thieves & robbers." (John 10:8) "Watch out; don't be fooled. Many men, claiming to be me, will come & say, 'I am he!' ... But don't follow them." (Luke 21:8)

He said ... "The gate to hell is wide & the road that leads to it is easy, & there are many who travel it. But the gate to life is narrow & the way that leads to it is hard, & there are few people who find it. Be on your guard against false prophets." (Matthew 7:13-15)

If Jesus was right, then all other **religions** are **false** simply by the process of logical elimination. But why?

Why is Jesus the only way?

And this is where many Christians are deeply confused.

I want to take you back to the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Crucifixion was the cruelest form of execution. It was reserved for rebels & slaves. Death was agonizingly slow, the result of shock & exposure & eventual affixation. People just died for lack of air.

But for Jesus, the pain of the cross paled in the face of a greater anguish, a deeper torment that couldn't be seen. (Mark 15:34) Something far more excruciating than the nails that held His body on the cross, & much more dreadful than all those lashes that ripped His flesh.

It was a dark, terrible agony & infinite misery as God the Father unleashed His fury upon His sinless Son, as if He were guilty of all sin. (1 John 2:2)

Now why did God punish the innocent One? ...

(X) Nailed to the top of Jesus' cross was a piece of parchment. It was called the certificate of debt.

It told of the crimes that Jesus committed, which He was being punished for. It was His "rap sheet."

And what was written on that piece of paper? ...

"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (John 19:19)
That was His crime! Now obviously He was guilty of that, (by the way, the cross was payment for that crime) ... but God, the Father,

actually saw another "certificate" nailed there.

Now when a person paid for their particular crime their certificate was "rendered." And the Greek word for that is Τετέλεσται, which means "cancelled" or "paid in full." And what that means is that the person can't be charged for that crime that was paid for ever again.

But being the King of the Jews was not really the crime that Jesus paid for. Because hidden to all but the Father was this other certificate that Paul refers to. (X)
"God forgave us all our sins; he canceled the unfavorable record of our debts with its binding rules & did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross."

(Colossians 2:13-14)

There was a certificate of debt that represented our sins against God, our complete "rap sheet", nailed to that cross, which only the Father & Jesus could see.

And in the darkness, that shrouded Calvary from the 6th to the 9th hour a Divine transaction took place that is the foundation of why Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Jesus made a **trade** with His Father. The crimes of all humanity, every murder, every theft, every lustful glance, every hidden act of vice, every moment of pride, every monstrous act of evil ... every sin of every man & every woman that has ever been committed was poured out upon Jesus as if He was guilty of all of them.

So, it wasn't the cross that took Jesus' life. He doesn't die of exposure, or loss of blood, or affixation. When the full payment was made, when the last of the debt melted away, when the justice of God was finally satisfied ... Jesus simply dismissed His spirit.

But just before He did that, what did He say? ... He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) Now He wasn't saying, "Boy, I'm glad this is finally over with."

In the Greek what He said was a single word. And the word was Τετέλεσται ... "paid in full."

You see, the reason that Jesus is the only way of salvation is that He is the only one who solved the sin problem. Buddha didn't do that. Zarathustra didn't do that. Krishna didn't do that. Muhammad didn't do that. No other person on earth did that because they all had their own crimes/sins stuck on that cross.

It was only the magnificent sinless One ... which is why "There's Something About That Name." In His sacrifice upon the cross ... a trade was made.

"Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

It all comes down to that simple transaction. And it's precisely why Jesus is the only way to God. Jesus accomplished for you & me what nobody else could ever do. He secured our forgiveness, He paid our debt, through His own pain, suffering, & blood.

So, you've had the opportunity this morning to see how all of this fits together. And if you've already come to faith, I hope your understanding of what Jesus has done for you has deepened significantly.

But if you haven't yet come to faith, my prayer is that what I've said has caused you to think about your own sin, your own rap sheet, your own certificate of debt, those crimes that are mounting day-after-day-after-day-after-day-after-day against you.

Jesus has taken your punishment. And right now, 4 days before Thanksgiving, all you have to do is bow your head & say ... "Jesus, thank you. Please rescue me.

I've broken your law, I'm guilty, & I deserve to be punished for what I did. I know that. But I turn to you now & ask you to please forgive me. Make my life new."

Jesus is the one, the only one who can do that.

That's the significance of the cross.

MARANA THA