

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MISSION

Week Three | July 22, 2018 | Why Jesus is the Only Way

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 11:14–12:12. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The only way to be saved is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

The Bible is very clear that there is no other way to salvation except through Jesus Christ. In order for a life on mission to make sense, we must be firmly rooted in this truth.

MEDITATE

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Luke 11:23).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *“All religions are basically the same.” Do you agree? If so, why? If not, how would you respond to this claim?*

“All religions are basically the same” is a very common view in today’s society. It is generally referred to as pluralism or universalism. For many people, claiming that one religion is right and all others are wrong is closed-minded, arrogant, and judgmental. It seems far more charitable, loving, and embracing to say that all religions are fundamentally the same and superficially different. According to apologist, Ravi Zacharias, if we think about it carefully, really the opposite is true. All religions are fundamentally different and only superficially the same.

In a 2010 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religious & Public Life, 84% of the world’s population identifies with a specific religious group. Therefore, approximately 5.8 billion people around the globe are affiliated with a specific religion—2.2 billion Christians, 1.6 billion Muslims, 1 billion Hindus, 500 million Buddhists, and 400 million who practice various folk or traditional religions (African traditional religions, Chinese folk religion, American Indian religions, Australian aboriginal religions, etc.), and 14 million Jews. An estimated 58 million people—less than 1% of the world’s population—belong to religions like Baha’i, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, etc. These are the only religions that are compatible with pluralism or universalism. All other religions claim exclusivity of some sort. That means 99.5% of the world’s religious population (again, 84% of the world population) disagrees with the claim that there are many ways to God.

Of course, this argument doesn’t prove that Christianity is true and other religions are false, but it does help us see that the majority of the world does not agree with the pluralist position and does not consider it arrogant to believe there is only one way to salvation. In reality, pluralism is the more extreme and arrogant position. It makes the radical claim that all the religions that claim exclusivity are fundamentally false. By nature of their position, pluralists reveal that they aren’t really listening to what other religions are saying, nor are they respecting them enough to take what they say seriously.

If you survey all religions in the world, you can divide them into two main categories, Christianity and all other religions. Christianity stands in a category of its own. It cannot be incorporated into other religions, nor can it stand equally beside other religions. Tim Keller explains this point by saying that all other religions have prophets that show them the way to God or some sort of “salvation.” Yet Jesus never claimed to be a prophet who could show us how to get to God. He was God Himself who came to get us. Therefore, either Christianity is exclusively true or exclusively false, but it cannot be the same as all other religions.

But how do we know that Christianity is exclusively true? Luke answers this question by giving an account of what Jesus Himself says about this issue. Some like to argue that Jesus never claimed to be God and never suggested that Christianity was the only true religion. They think Jesus' disciples were the ones to draw the hard lines and insist Christianity was the only way. However, as we will see today, Jesus was very clear on this subject. He is God and He is the only way to salvation.

Q: *Discuss how holding to the exclusivity of Christianity requires you to be anything other than arrogant, closed-minded, or judgmental.*

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Today we will study a passage from Luke's gospel in which Jesus gives His own arguments for the exclusivity of Christianity. He does not let us hold the view that every religious perspective is right. On the contrary, He tells us we have to make a choice.

1. EITHER THE KINGDOM OF GOD OR THE KINGDOM OF THE WORLD

2. EITHER THE SON OF GOD OR ALL OTHER PROPHETS

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

EITHER THE KINGDOM OF GOD OR THE KINGDOM OF THE WORLD

▣ **LUKE 11:14-26**

Q: *How did people respond to Jesus casting out the demon?*

This story of Jesus healing a man by casting out a demon is not a sensational account. It simply begins with the facts. Jesus healed a man who was possessed by a demon. When the demon was gone, the man, who had been mute, was able to speak. There was physical evidence of a spiritual reality. Jesus demonstrated once again that He was Lord of both the spiritual and the physical realms.

Two groups of people responded to Jesus' miracle. Some were cynics (Luke 11:15) who accused Jesus of being in league with Satan, giving Him the authority to command the demons. Others were skeptics (Luke 11:16), convinced it was some sort of trick and wanted further proof.

Q: *How do you see versions of these two groups in contemporary society?*

Have you ever wondered how Jesus would respond to cynics and skeptics? In these verses we get to see! In verses 17–26, Jesus responds to both groups. He paints a picture to capture their imagination. A group that is internally at war with itself, fighting over who is in power cannot last long. Eventually, it will collapse. So, it makes no sense that Jesus would cast out Satan by Satan's power. If that were the case, Satan would be compromising his power and destroying his own kingdom.

In verse 19, Jesus points out an inconsistency in the cynic's accusation. At the time, there were Jews claiming to be exorcists who cast out demons. Jesus wonders why they don't turn that same accusation on them. Why don't they say their people are under Satan's power as well? Jesus points out their hypocrisy and the emptiness of their accusation. Their claims were logically inconsistent and applied hypocritically.

Jesus speaks directly to the skeptics, giving another explanation for what happened. This isn't a divided kingdom, but a new kingdom that has come! In verse 20, Jesus says it is "by the finger of God" that He casts out demons. What an amazing thought! This phrase was an echo of Exodus 8:19, when God sent the plague of gnats to the Egyptians

because they refused to release the Israelites from slavery. Pharaoh asked his magicians to duplicate the plague to discredit the claim that it came as a punishment from God, but the magicians were unable to do it. In reporting their failure to Moses, they said, “This is the finger of God.” This was a way of saying it wasn’t a trick, it wasn’t magic. It was a direct work of God, not something that came from anyone else.

In verse 21–22, Jesus is the strong man who, rather than working with Satan, destroys Satan’s house and takes away the spoils. His kingdom will be victorious over Satan’s and He will receive an inheritance of nations. He tells the crowd in verses 23–26 to be aware that there are two kingdoms, but there are only two kingdoms. God’s kingdom is not the same as Satan’s. But at the same time, there are not many different kingdoms that are basically all the same. The choice is to either be with Christ or against Him, to either gather people into the kingdom of God through a life on mission or further Satan’s work of pushing people away from God. There is no neutral ground in spiritual warfare.

This claim of exclusivity is black and white, but it should always be lived out by people who are marked by their humility and grace. Those who have a sense of superiority to others because they have found the “right path” have clearly not understood the gospel. They have not recognized themselves as former enemies of God who are now counted as friends, not by their good works or their ability to find the right answer, but only by the remarkable grace and justice demonstrated on the cross.

❓ *Do you gather people by sharing the gospel and living a life transformed by the gospel, or do you gather them by failing to share the gospel and living a life that looks the same as everyone else’s?*

❓ *Before you became a Christian, did you see yourself as “against God” or on neutral ground? How necessary is it to genuine conversion to recognize that you are an enemy of God if you are not in Christ?*

EITHER THE SON OF GOD OR ALL OTHER PROPHETS

❏ **LUKE 11:27–36**

Q: *What did the woman in the crowd misunderstand about Jesus? How did He lovingly, but clearly correct her?*

We are all a work in progress. Anyone who has ever taught children knows that just as it seems they have finally understood, they say something that reveals they are still confused. This is the situation with the woman in the crowd (verses 27–28) who was convinced that Jesus was someone incredibly special, probably the most amazing spiritual teacher she has ever seen.

She begins to think in a way that is not uncommon to us. When we see a really special person, we wonder what his or her parents were like. We think surely they did something right and had to be amazing people. This is the woman's thought process. How blessed Jesus' mother must be to have a son like Him! Surely, she is a wonderful person to have raised such a man.

But Jesus corrects her in a very loving, yet very clear way. He doesn't shame her or make her feel bad for being theologically mistaken. Instead, He says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" He corrects her by redirecting her away from any kind of veneration of Mary. He does not affirm her statement, but turns her away from an awe of Mary to an awe of God's word. The true blessed ones are not those who happen to be in Jesus' family line. Blessed are those who hear and obey God's Word.

Then Jesus turns to the cynical, skeptical crowd once again, giving them further support for the claim that He is the only way to salvation. He says they have received sign after sign for thousands of years. They are like the people who demand more and more proof that Jesus rose from the dead or that the Bible is true. No matter how much proof they get, they still refuse to surrender their lives to the truth. They continue in a vicious cycle, demanding more proof and never being satisfied. So, in verse 16, to the crowd that demanded another sign, Jesus says the only sign they will get is the "sign of Jonah," referring to the prophet God called to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh.

Jonah disobeyed and ran the other way. God caused Jonah to be swallowed up into the belly of a great fish for three days. This story points to a "Greater Jonah" who, instead of disobeying God and running the other direction, would willingly submit Himself to death for three days until He was resurrected. Being in the belly of a great fish and coming out alive seems like quite a miracle, but Jesus' miracle was greater. These people would see Jesus' death and resurrection. It would be the sign of all signs. No other sign would be needed after that.

Jesus then reminds them of Solomon and the “queen of the South.” This woman, who was likely Ethiopian, came to seek wisdom from Solomon. She knew the value of true wisdom and was willing to leave everything for it. She would have harsh words for the crowd who would look in the face of Wisdom personified and demand a further sign.

Jesus furthers this point with another metaphor. No one turns on a light and then puts it in a closet. Jesus said to the people in the crowd that their eyes are not healthy. They have an eye for evil and not for the light. Again, Jesus draws a sharp line between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. There is no alternative. If you want to live in the light, you must be in the kingdom of God. If you want to live in the shadows and in darkness, you can stay in the kingdom of the world.

Q: *Jesus’ illustration drew from historical and cultural examples the people were familiar with. What are some historical and cultural examples for our times that would help illustrate Jesus’ point?*

Q: *Do you know a cynic or skeptic who continually asks for more proof but that proof isn’t getting them closer to belief? How can you use Jesus’ example of how to engage them?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *In what ways do you experience cynicism and skepticism, even as a Christian? How do Jesus’ words in this passage speak to you?*

Q: *What can you learn from the way Jesus corrected the woman in the crowd? How can you grow in being clear about what the Bible says while doing so lovingly and graciously?*

Q: *After reading today's text, return to the question we asked at the beginning of this lesson. Do you agree that all religions are basically the same? If so, why? If not, how would you respond to this claim?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, apart from Christ I know that I am your enemy. Forgive me for my tyranny against Your rule in my life and my desire to be my own creator and sustainer. Thank You that, through Christ, I am now seated at your table as a friend. May this truth make me humble and grateful for what You've done for me. May I proclaim it to others with humility and grace as well.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 11:26 If Israel rejects the Messiah after all the evidence God has given them, their judgment will be far worse than it would have been if they had not received all the evidence from God. Active rejection of the gospel leads to greater judgment. Seven demons implies a full contingent of demons.

LUKE 11:32 At least the Ninevites repented and returned to God after Jonah preached to them. "This generation," however, has hardened their hearts continually, even before Jesus Himself.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*