

The Gospel – Plain and Clear

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“All paths lead to God.” “Who are you to tell me I’m wrong?” “Each person’s religion is equally true!” These phrases echo through the halls of our culture. With literally hundreds of religions in the world how are we to even begin the journey towards finding true spirituality?

Well first thing’s first; all religions can’t be true. The reason for this is that they all teach different things. Judaism says there is one God, Hinduism says there are over 330 million gods. Obviously, both of these claims can’t be true! Likewise, Christianity says that Jesus died in our place on a cross, whereas Islam says that he didn’t die at all. Again, both can’t be true. So how do we know what to believe? Why is it even important? Why not just give up and wait until death to find out? Well we’re certainly free to do so, but before we throw our hands in the air in frustration can we take a moment to look at the life of a man who claimed to have the answers we crave?

Jesus was a Jewish carpenter who lived around 2000 years ago in Israel. For a while he was known as a great teacher and a miracle worker. But there were many of those in his time; what made him unique? What exactly did he teach? Jesus taught that there was one God. He also taught that humans, both man and woman, were made in the image of God and had once even enjoyed a close relationship with God. This is why we have intrinsic value and worth. However, humanity decided that they knew better than God how they should live so they ignored the warnings He gave them and chose to turn away and do their own thing. (This sounds familiar doesn’t it? Everyone since then has continued to do this at some point in their lives. Just check out the six o’clock news!)

Jesus also taught that God wanted to bring men and women back into the relationship they had at first, but their ‘Sin’ or crimes against God, kept them away. Jesus said that men and women had become stained by their sin and that in order to be with God, they must be cleansed of their guilt; they must pay the penalty for their crimes. Jesus taught that though some people’s sins were more abundant than others when measured by God’s standard of perfection, we all have come up short. He also taught that each person’s crimes were so great that the only fair penalty was death! (Sounds harsh, but that’s what he taught!) However, Jesus said that besides being ‘Just’, God was also ‘Loving’. In fact, Jesus taught that God was the very source of all human love. God knew that each person’s sin had to be paid for by his or her own life but He loved us too much to not offer us a way out. This being said, it seems that God is in a dilemma—caught between two aspects of His own nature. How can He let humanity pay their deserved penalty (i.e. death) and yet still have a living relationship with them? It seems impossible...unless...

Now here’s where it gets crazy! Jesus claimed that he was God! You heard me right, Jesus said that he was the God against whom humans had been sinning all along! Now, obviously, people didn’t believe him, who would? So they had him executed for blasphemy and for stirring people up to follow him. (Their form of execution was nailing the offender to a wooden cross and then

letting him hang there until he died!) But here's the kicker—before he was killed, Jesus taught that as God in human form, he had the power to forgive peoples' sins because he was the one against whom they had sinned. What's more, by willfully giving his life and allowing himself to be killed, he met his own standard of justice because he took the place of humanity's death. He was the only one who could do this because he was the creator of all people, therefore, he could fairly represent all people and suffer the penalty that their crimes deserved. (You know, Gandhi once said that there was nothing in any other religion that even came close to resembling the cross of Christ—God dying in the place of humanity! And he's right!)

Okay, so how does any of this help us? And what's more, how can we be expected to believe such a far-fetched tale? Well, if Jesus had merely died then nothing he taught would be believable. He would be just another dead lunatic. However—and this is the clincher—before Jesus died, he told his followers that he would be killed and would rise from the dead three days later and that's how they would know he was who he said he was. And that's exactly what he did! He came back from the dead and hung out for more than a month with his friends and followers. Over 500 people interacted with him during this time. The authorities had to invent a story about his friends stealing his body because no one could figure out how it had disappeared!

Now here's the best part, Jesus said that he had paid the penalty for all people, but he couldn't force them to accept his payment. They had to do that for themselves. They had to believe that he was who he said he was and then turn from their former rebellion by allowing him to cleanse them and restore their relationship with God. His message was (and still is) that simple: 'Repent' (turn from sin) and believe and you shall be saved from death and enjoy the relationship with God and the relationships with others that you were created for. This is the essence of Christianity; this is what Jesus himself taught. Do you believe Jesus was who he said he was? The evidence is there; I encourage you to check for yourself if you don't believe it.