

Over the last few weeks we've been in a series of messages entitled, *Call Me Crazy*. In this series I've tried to explain to you why I believe what I believe about God's existence, the Bible, and Creation. Today, I want to conclude our study by sharing w/ you why I believe Jesus is the only way to God.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the only truth, and the only life. No one can come to the Father except through me." John 14:6

This is quite the claim. To say you're the only access point to God is either one of the greatest expressions of arrogance in human history or the greatest expression of love and truth.

What makes Jesus different from Socrates, Mohammed, Buddha, or any of the others? After all, don't all religions lead to God? The Politically Correct response might be all roads lead to God, but **Jesus' answer is – NO!**

Ancient Hindu Story – 6 men are brought to see an elephant. Touching the elephant's side, the 1st man says, "It's like a wall." The 2nd man, touching the tusk says, "It's like a spear." The 3rd man, holding the trunk, says, "It's like a snake." The 4th man, embracing a leg says, "It's like a tree." The 5th man, holding an ear, says, "It's like a fan." And the 6th man, holding the tail says, "It's like a rope."

The point is each man is correct so long as he's touching a part of the elephant – meaning all religions lead to God.

In an age of conflicting religious claims, there's no issue that so challenges the modern mind more than the authenticity of the founder of Christianity. For if Jesus is who He said He was and did what he said He would do – then all other paths are dead ends – and His way is the only way.

No founder of any religion has dared to claim for himself one fraction of the assertions made by Jesus about himself. No religion has claimed for its founder what Christianity has claimed for the Christ. *Henry Heydt*

But isn't faith a Matter of **SINCERITY**

LISTEN: It doesn't matter how sincere you are if you're wrong. There's no advantage to sincerity if a person is worshiping a non-existent god.

People of the *Flat Earth Society* can believe the earth is flat but their beliefs will never change the fact the earth is round.

I can sincerely believe my *Altima* is a *Porsche*, but I'm not going to wake up tomorrow to find a *Porsche* in my garage!

You can paint wings on a pig, call it a bird, toss it off a cliff – but it won't fly. Why? B/c pigs don't fly! *Unknown*

Point: The issue of faith isn't based on sincerity but on truth! And truth operates independent of feelings and desires. Truth must be able to be reasonably substantiated.

Then faith must be a Matter of **OPINION**

opinion – a view or conclusion about something or someone that's not necessarily based on fact or knowledge. In other words – **an opinion is a strongly held belief that can't be substantiated and has no basis of credibility.**

Problem: If you fuel your journey on the opinions of others you're going to run out of gas. *Dr. Steve Maraboli*

The opinions of the misanthropical rest upon this very partial basis – that they adopt the bad faith of a few as evidence of the worthlessness of all. *NY Writer – Christian Bovee*

In other words, just b/c the masses pool their ignorance w/ no basis but an unreliable opinion and popular vote – it still doesn't make it true – and ultimately – it is worthless.

Christianity claims there's one God who exists in trinity. Muslims and Jews disagree – they believe God is indivisibly one. Hinduism claims everything is God – you're god, I'm god, my dog is god. Buddha was non-committal – agnostic.

Point: We may all be wrong but we all can't be right!

There's not a halfway house and there's no parallel in other religions. If you could ask Buddha, "Are you the son of Bramah?" He'd say, "My son, you're still in the vale of illusion." If you could go to Socrates and ask, "Are you Zeus?" He'd laugh at you. If you could go to Mohammed and ask, "Are you Allah?" He'd first have rent his clothes and then cut off your head. If you asked Confucius, "Are you Heaven?" He'd probably reply, "Remarks which aren't in accordance w/ nature are in bad taste." *C.S. Lewis*

So do you really want to base your eternity on an opinion? I hope not. **That's the beauty of Jesus and the cross.** It's not a matter of opinion – it is a matter of fact.

A Matter of FACT – The fact Jesus was a historical figure has never been in doubt. Secular/Jewish history, and the Bible, overwhelmingly authenticates His life. So the better question is – *Was He God – did He rise from the dead?*

While there are many angles we could use to validate His claims, I believe the **ONE** item that separates Jesus from all others is this death, burial, and resurrection. This is the most unique identifying mark of who He is and what He claimed.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. If the resurrection didn't take place; Christianity is a false religion. But if it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth.

If Christ hasn't been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.... if Christ hasn't been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins... 1 Cr. 15:14-19

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus has been more carefully examined than any other event in history. The greatest of scholars have endeavored to both uphold it and disprove it. Personally, I don't know one person who's ever honestly taken the time to examine the evidence to not come away convinced Jesus did in fact arise from the grave.

Some of the evidence is basic. For example, the fact there's an Easter Sunday tracing its roots to a Passover in Palestine 2000 yrs. ago speaks to the resurrection. Christian art/music over the centuries offers proof of the cross/resurrection.

One of the more significant proofs of the resurrection is the Church. Did you know the church is the largest institution to ever exist in human history? It is 5x larger than the Roman Empire at its greatest extent w/ more than 1.3 bil. people worshipping Jesus today as Savior.

One scholar remarked – The Grand Canyon wasn't formed by an Indian dragging a big stick. *Unknown*

Neither was the church formed by the hearsay of a few men. It's an indisputable fact of history that the church finds its beginnings in Jerusalem around AD 30 after the resurrection.

Did you know Jesus fulfilled over 400 Messianic prophecies – here are a few He fulfilled in the last 24 hrs. of his life:

| <u>Description</u> | <u>Prophecy</u> | <u>Fulfillment</u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Betrayed by a Friend | Ps.41:9 | Mt. 10:4 |
| Sold – 30 Silver Pieces | Zech. 11:12 | Mt. 26:15 |
| Wounded and Bruised | Is. 53:5 | Mt. 27:26 |
| Hands/feet Pierced | Ps. 22:16 | Luke 23:33 |
| Crucified w/ Thieves | Is. 53.12 | Mt. 27:38 |
| Lots Cast for Garments | Ps. 22:18 | John 19:23-24 |
| Gall and Vinegar Offered | Ps. 69:21 | Mt. 17:34 |
| Bones not Broken | Ps. 34:20 | John 19:33 |
| His Side Pierced | Zech. 12:10 | John 19:34 |
| Rich Man's Tomb | Isaiah 53:9 | Mt. 27:57-60 |

Mathematician Peter Stoner – for Jesus to fulfill 48 of these prophecies is 1 in 10^{156} – or 1 followed by 156 zeros. This number is 420% larger than our known numbering system.

For the remainder of our time this AM, I want to look at (3) basic realities of the resurrection b/c when all is said and done, the resurrection is either – fiction, fantasy, or fact.

I His Death and Resurrection is FICTION

It was a lie – fraud. When considering if the resurrection is fiction, some people have suggested the disciples conspired to deceive the world into believing Jesus rose from the dead.

Basically – 12 random guys came together to plan/execute a scheme so profound it changed the course of history. Somehow these men were able to elevate a common Rabbi to rock star status that so rattled the religious establishment they had Him killed. Then under a cloak of darkness, they were able to fool, overpower, or payoff the Roman guards so they could remove His body and claim his resurrection.

Scottish theologian, Dr. Principal Hill summed it up best: You must suppose the (12) men of mean birth, of no education, living in that humble station which placed ambitious views out of their reach an far from their thoughts, w/out any aid from the state, formed the noblest scheme which ever entered into the mind of man, adopted the most daring means of executing that scheme, and conducted it w/ such address as to conceal the imposture under the semblance of simplicity and virtue. You must suppose that men guilty of blasphemy and falsehood, united in an attempt to best contrived, and which has in fact proved the most successful, for making the world virtuous; that they formed this singular enterprise w/out seeking any advantage to themselves, w/ an avowed contempt of loss and profit, and w/ the certain expectation of scorn and persecution; that although conscious of one another's villainy, none of them ever thought of providing for his own security by disclosing the fraud, but that amidst sufferings the most grievous to flesh and blood they persevered in their conspiracy to cheat the world into piety, honesty, and benevolence.

To think an eclectic group of guys could pull off the greatest hoax in history and get nothing in return is brilliant.

Some skeptics have proposed a theory called the **Intentional Fulfillment Argument**. They argue that Jesus knew the prophecies and lived his life to fulfill them – only there are too many details about His life he couldn't have coerced.

How could he have controlled being born in Bethlehem?

How could He have arranged His ancestry?

How did He get Sanhedrin give Judas 30-pieces of silver?

How could He have controlled the details of His execution?

Maybe the resurrection is a myth, urban legend, or legend.

II His Death and Resurrection is FANTASY

Some skeptics offer the **Altered Gospel Argument**. This argument holds Jesus didn't fulfill any of the prophecies, but instead the gospel writers fabricated the story. **But had His story been fabricated you can be certain it would've been exposed as a lie by the Romans/Jews. They would've produced the body to squelch the Church.**

Maybe what is legend is that He died. Some skeptics suggest the **Swoon Argument** saying Jesus didn't really die – but fainted and then once in the tomb extricated himself from His grave clothes, rolled the stone and escaped unnoticed.

According to Jewish law, the body of an executed criminal couldn't remain up all night or **it'd defile the land God had given the Jews** (Dt. 12:23). It was Roman custom to leave the bodies for days as a reminder of Rome's power. But b/c it was Passover, the Jewish leaders asked to speed up the process for these criminals. So the soldiers would break the legs of those crucified so they could no longer push up to breathe. But when they came to Jesus was already dead.

B/c the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified w/ Jesus, and then those of the other. John 19:31-32

These Roman soldiers knew death – they were professional executioners. There's no way they would've let Jesus off the Cross if He was alive. To make a mistake like that would be their own death sentence. So to make sure, John tells us one of the soldiers plunged a spear in Jesus side.

Consider the Facts – forget that when the centurion pierced Jesus' side w/ a spear in which blood and water flood (signifying death) – but how could anyone survive 40 lashes from a Roman soldier, the walk to Golgotha carrying a cross-timber, hours on a cross struggling to breathe, and then basically being mummified in spices and grave clothes?

And let's suppose He somehow survived this cruelty and was able to extricate himself – how does a man w/ such wounds roll a boulder uphill and then walk 14 miles that afternoon to Emmaus? This idea is preposterous.

The Journal of the American Medical Association, Dr. William Edwards: "Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust b/w His right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured His death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus didn't die on the cross appear to be at odds w/ modern medical knowledge."

III His Death and Resurrection is FACT

Fact 1 – Christ died on the cross

Fact 2 – Christ was buried in a borrowed tomb

Fact 3 – Christ's disciples were discouraged

Fact 4 – Christ's tomb was empty 3 days later

Fact 5 – Christ appeared to His disciples

Fact 6 – Christ's followers were radically transformed

Fact 7 – Christ appeared to over 500 eyewitnesses

If these witnesses and information were shared in a court of law, there is no question a judge and jury would approve the claim based on the evidence – 500 witnesses!

If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. No shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology to disprove this statement. *Maier*

Conversation w/ two people on a plane from Houston to Nashville – they couldn't believe how narrow my beliefs were on the issue of salvation/Jesus. I said it's simple. The way of salvation is exclusive; but the gift is inclusive.

I asked – Was Jesus a liar?

Of course not!

I asked – Was Jesus a lunatic?

No, not at all!

I asked – Was Jesus a legend?

No – he lived!

I asked – Was Jesus the Lord?

Absolutely Not!

I said – You're out of options

I got a funny look

I asked – Which is more probable?

You may ignore Him, but you can't avoid Him. You may reject Him, but you can't escape Him? He is a stubborn fact of history and one day you will have to face Him – you can do it this side of eternity and find forgiveness and heaven, or you can do it on the other side of eternity and face the consequences of your poor decision in condemnation.

Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been given to us by which we can be saved. Acts 4:12