

“Taking Out the Guesswork”

I remember a history professor of mine back in college who prided himself on picking and choosing parts of the world’s major religions that he liked and then combining those parts all in an attempt to create something unique for him. He liked the Buddhist teaching of looking deep within one’s self to find that spark of the divine. He was intrigued by the Hindu allure of not one God, but thousands who were in control of the universe. Jesus was even part of it because he was a great example of how we should treat other people. This Jesus he could relate to, but not the Jesus who said he was “the way, the truth, and the life.” You see, in this professor’s mind, one path to God was not only limiting, but kind of silly. He chose instead to focus on some of cool spiritual things like finding meaning in life—things that he thought could help people find answers to eternal questions. And when I think of the time I spent in this professor’s class, I honestly don’t remember that much of what he taught me about the ancient Egyptians or anything else for that matter. But what I do remember is how convinced he was that all the major religions of the world could ultimately lead a person not only to God but to heaven. What do you think?

The truth is people can sincerely believe they’re on the right path and still end up in the wrong place. This is nothing new. Take the Corinthians, who Paul was writing to in our epistle reading tonight. He was trying to set them straight as what the cross of Christ really meant. “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,” he writes as if to say *they might have been sincere in what it took for them to believe, but they were heading down the wrong path.* “But as for us,” he continued, “we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles. But here’s the thing— “to those who God has called, both Jews and Greeks, this message is Christ who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For what seems to be God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what seems to be God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”

What Paul was saying to the Corinthians and to us tonight is that it might look like there are a lot of ways to God and eternal life. It might even feel like there a lot of ways. But

the only way to him is through faith in the crucified Christ. Sure, it might seem like a weird way for some folks. It might even offend others. But none of us are that impressive. No matter what our family trees look like; no matter how many great things we have accomplished or where we come from, none if it accounts for anything when it comes to one's position before God. All that counts is Christ.

No doubt that was a hard thing for the Corinthians to even begin to comprehend. We know it was hard for the Jews and we know it's hard for people like my college history professor, many of our friends and family members, and maybe even for some of you here tonight. Besides, it can sound offensive we certainly don't want to offend anyone with our so called exclusivity to God. Plus, it sounds kind of like we know it all and we know that we really don't. But remember what Paul said. We can't know God through our own wisdom. It's impossible. Sure, everyone has a natural knowledge of right and wrong. But that's not what Paul is talking about. He is talking about what it is only possible through the gift of faith in a Savior. And this Savior's death appears shameful and foolish but is the only basis of everyone's salvation. And this is no exaggeration. We have an amazing God my friends. Because of our sinful nature, all of us deserve to be left on our own to fend for ourselves. But we have a God who is not against us but acts for us.

Think about this, especially our confirmation students here tonight. Christianity is the only religion that points to God acting uniquely **for** humanity. It's the only one. God became a human being so he could experience the broken world we live in. The difference is he didn't give into all like we do. He was perfect **for us**. And then God gave his perfect life **for us**. It might sound like a foolish message to preach God in the flesh crucified but that's the way God chose to make himself accessible to us. It is so beyond what we are capable of believing or even thinking of on our own, but rather than forcing us to try to and make decisions about him on our own or allowing us to go down whatever path we choose trying to find him, God made a clear path to us through a person—and that person is Jesus.

Jesus came to show us exactly what God is like. He takes the guesswork out of our spiritual journey. We don't have to wonder about who God is or whether he really cares about us or has some secret hidden agenda. In Jesus we see that God is loving, patient, kind, and most of all forgiving. In Jesus, we see that God makes us his priority and that He will do whatever it takes to get us back. For Paul, nothing demonstrated that more than Jesus' death on the cross. And now, because of God's way, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, "you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us, righteousness,

sanctification, and redemption. Jesus is our answer. Jesus is everyone's answer because He is God's way of giving us a way home.

I was reminded of this old joke the other day. A family had just finished moving the last box from their truck into their new home. As they looked at the mess inside, they realized that their little dog was missing. The husband jumped into the truck and headed back to their old neighborhood to find their dog.

He spent several minutes driving all around the neighborhood with no luck. Finally, he stopped and asked an old neighbor sitting on his front porch if he had seen their dog. "Yes," he replied. She's been chasing your car for the last 10 minutes.

That's the way it is with God. The truth is that for everyone who is trying to find Him, including you and me, the whole time he has been looking for us. This God we've been trying to find by going down various paths has made for us a clear and straight path to us through Jesus. This God we've been trying to get to know wants to know us and has made it possible for us to enjoy a relationship with him through Jesus! Everything we think we want; everything we're hoping for on our spiritual quest is found and fulfilled in the crucified Savior!

Jesus takes the guesswork out of finding God. I know it's hard to understand at times. It always has been. But God's desire is not that we understand it. His desire is that we believe it. And that's a hard thing to do sometimes, because there are a lot of competing messages out there. But none are as beautiful and loving as God's message to us in Christ. None offer any assurance like God's message to us in Christ. Jesus and only Jesus went to the cross to assure each of us hope, joy, peace, forgiveness, and most of all eternal life. Believe it and talk about it because there is no better news. **Amen.**