

Sermon – Other gods

Jeremiah 10:1-16; 1 Corinthians 8:1-6

Many people are thinking about their beliefs and want to talk.

In 2011, a survey on faith said these 6 things:

(http://mccrindle.com.au/resources/Australian-Communities-Report_McCrindle-Research.pdf):

1. Over 50% of Australians call themselves religious.
2. 40% of Australians consider themselves Christian. But only 9% of Australians regularly go to a Christian church.
3. About 1% identified themselves as Jews, 1% as Hindus, 1% as Muslims, 3% as Buddhists and 5% as “other” religions. 31% as NO religion.
4. Only 4% of people are passionately opposed to Christianity. So MOST people are in some way **open** to talk about Christianity.
5. More than half of Australia believe at least partly in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
6. 40% of people said the best way to talk about faith is by conversation and discussion!

Why all these statistics?

I want us to understand that most people in our country, are very open and interested and even identify with Christianity. However most people don't know much about it. Therefore, it's important that we simply make an **effort** to talk with people about our faith!

Today I want to do three things:

1. First, I want to talk briefly about what other religions believe, just to give us a little more of an idea of other faiths and other gods.
2. Second, we'll talk about what we believe as Christians and what makes our faith unique
3. Finally, we'll talk about the best way to talk with people about other beliefs and other gods.

1. What do other religions believe?

We simply CANNOT talk about every major religion and belief in the time we have. So, here's a brief overview of some of the major religions:

Buddhism

Buddha said: “No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path.”

Buddhism is about enlightenment. Buddha (Prince Siddharta Gautama) lived between the 6th and 4th Centuries BC. He taught that the suffering of the world is the direct result of human desires – desire for wealth, comfort, self-recognition, etc. Removing

those desires, through practicing his teachings, would lead to enlightenment and relieve us from the pain of the world. Buddhism is not a belief in a god. In Buddhism, you save yourself by walking the path of enlightenment.

Hinduism

When Mahatma Gandhi was asked if he was a Hindu, he replied: **“Yes I am, I am also a Muslim, a Christian, a Buddhist, and a Jew.”**

Hinduism is one of the world’s oldest religions. It is a mix of many philosophies and beliefs. Essentially, it is about following wisdom and duties in order to escape the cycle of life-death-rebirth and return to *Brahman*, the ultimate source of life.

It started about 1500BC. There is complete freedom of belief and worship. There are no “wrong” beliefs. Hence, Gandhi can claim to be a Hindu, as well as a Muslim, a Christian, A Buddhist and a Jew. There are over 300 million Hindu gods worshipped in India today.

Islam

But let’s compare that to Islam: The Quran says: “The only true faith in God's sight is Islam.” Quran 3:19; "The Imrans," [Dawood, p. 51](#)

Islam is about **submission** to the will of Allah. It is a way of life more than it is a set of beliefs. And it is not about faith as much as it is about **submission** to God’s law.

Muslims believe in one god, they believe in the Quran as the very Word of god , and they believe Muhammad is his prophet. Islam is descended from Abraham, and their prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. “Allah” is simply the word for “god” in Arabic.

Muslims do not believe that Jesus is God. He is only a prophet. People are judged on what THEY have done, on their good and bad deeds. So until you die, you cannot be sure if you have done enough good to go to heaven (paradise).

Judaism

Jews believe in one god, the god of our Old Testament. But they do not believe that Jesus is his Messiah, or King. So they do not believe the words of the New Testament. They live under the Old Covenant of the law, which determines everything – how you eat, how you work and rest, how you study and how you celebrate.

So, there is a **very** quick look at the four big religions. But what about Christianity, the world’s largest religion?

2. What do we believe? How is Christianity unique?

We believe lots of things. We believe there is only one God. We believe heaven and hell exist. We believe Jesus died on the cross 2000 years ago to pay the punishment from God for our sins. We believe he rose again from the dead and went to heaven. And we believe Jesus is God himself. We believe the truth of the Bible, Old and New Testament. We believe God’s plans for humanity started with his plans for the people of Israel.

But what really makes Christianity unique? What makes God different to the gods of other religions? Let me suggest 3 important differences. There are many others, but here are 3:

1. **Jesus is the only one** who can save us:

- Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)
- Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)
- Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12)

Our God says that Jesus is the only way to be saved.

2. Secondly, Jesus offers us a **personal relationship** with God. We can **personally** know God. God came to earth in Jesus, as a human, so we could know him personally. (John 14:23, 17:21)

3. Our faith depends on **trusting what Jesus has done**, not what **WE** have done. Our faith is about Jesus’ life and death and resurrection. It’s not about our good and bad deeds. We recognise that we are all sinners before God, and that we all need forgiveness. That’s called **GRACE**. God’s undeserved kindness to us through Jesus. He offer us forgiveness and lets us into heaven not because of what we’ve done, but **because we trust him and what HE has done**. So our good deeds are a **response** to God’s forgiveness, not a way of earning a place in heaven.

Christianity is unique, particularly because of these things:

- Saved by **Jesus only**
- Saved and brought into a **personal relationship** with God.
- Saved by **faith alone** – by what Jesus has done, not what we have done.

What do we say?

So, the big question is: **How do we talk to people about our faith, and about other gods?**

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 8:1

1Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

Paul says to the Corinthian church: “Knowledge puffs up while love builds up”

We can have all the **knowledge** about Christianity and other religions, but it’s no use without love. Paul wants us to think about what we say – NOT just what we know, but how we share it – in love. What is a LOVING way to talk to people about other gods and the Christian faith? Let me suggest three words:

1. **RESPECT**: The first word is respect. We need to respect how complex our society is and how complex people's faith is. Paul wanted the church to appreciate that they were living in a society where lots of people had different belief backgrounds. Just like our society today. Even in the church, there were people in Corinth who thought it was wrong to eat food sacrificed to idols. Because of their past beliefs and worship of other gods, their conscience said it was wrong to eat that food. We need to understand that people's beliefs in other gods have often been part of their culture as well as their faith system as they've grown up. And that's not something that can just be thrown away overnight. We must respect how complex people's beliefs and how complex our society is.

2. **HUMILITY**: The second word – humility. We all worship false gods from time to time. We may have worshipped the false gods of other religions, but we may also have worshipped the false gods of money, power, ourselves, our families, or we've worshipped education or knowledge or our career. We are all, from time to time, worshippers of false gods. We are all sinners in that respect. Remember how hard it is for you not to worship the false gods of this world as you speak to others who worship false gods. Have the humility to know that we all struggle with false gods in our life.

3. **TRUTH**: Always speak the **truth**, out of love. It's easy today to hide the truth. It's easy not to talk about some of the less popular parts of our faith, like Jesus being the only way to heaven. Or the belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus, or to talk about the Bible as God's true Word for us today. Or the existence of hell. We must not water down the truth. We share the good news. Speak the truth, in a loving way, and let God do his work in people's lives! If we love people, we will not hide the truth. But we **will** share it with them in a loving way.

So as we talk to people about our faith and about other gods, let's always remember that we do it out of love. We want them to know Jesus and be saved. So:

- Show respect for their beliefs.
- Show humility in understanding how hard it is not to worship the false gods of this world.
- And always speak the truth, even when it's not popular.

And remember – the best way to talk about faith with people is... to have a conversation!