

What about other religions?

Okay, everyone, let me draw you together again, let me gather you, and I'm going to try and answer the big question that we've chosen for the week, which is: what about other religions?

Now, it seems to me at a very popular level, that when we talk about religion, many people simply say to us, 'The thing that matters most of all is to be sincere. It doesn't really matter what you believe. As long as you are sincere, that's okay.' That's pretty standard, isn't it? 'Sincerity is what matters most of all.'

Now, it seems to me that in many other areas of our life, sincerity isn't enough. We know that, don't we? So I'll give you two examples. If I wanted to visit the most beautiful country in the world... So where am I thinking of? Scotland, okay? Beautiful, if I want to go and get a tan, that's where I want to go.

So I go to Scotland, and here I am in the north-east of England and I want to get to Scotland, so I head to the centre of the country, to the major motorway, and then I've got a choice. I can either go south, or I can go north. So I get my car and I go south, and the passengers in my car at this point are going, 'Hang on a minute! What are you doing?'

And I go, 'No, no. It's all right. I sincerely believe, really passionately, that if I drive very quickly south, then we're going to get to Scotland. Are you with me?' What are they going to say? Well, sincerity is not enough. I can be sincerely wrong.

Or if you think back to any exams that you have ever sat, or any exams that you're looking forward to, well, just suppose that the question that you have to answer, one of the questions is 'What is the capital of Scotland?'

And you think, 'Ooh, goodness! That's a toughie! And you're writing it down, and you write 'Cardiff'. Okay, that's what you write. And you're waiting for your paper to come back, you look at it, and there's a big red cross. Wrong.

And you're annoyed, so what do you do? You go to your teacher and you say, 'What's this?'

And the teacher says, 'Well, it's wrong, isn't it?'

And you say, 'No. I really sincerely believed that it was Cardiff.'

Well, what are they going to say to you? Still wrong, isn't it? You don't pass exams with your sincerity of belief, do you? At all. Or else we'd all get 100%. No, that is not the case at all.

We know that in many areas of our life sincerity is not good enough. Because you can be sincerely wrong. So what about in the whole area of religion? Is sincerity enough, or is it very, very different? Well, let me remind you of what we have already discovered tonight, the words of Jesus. These are what Jesus said, and it's so controversial, and yet such good news. Now, this is what Jesus said, from John chapter 3. We've already heard them, but let me read them again. Jesus says in verse 18 of John chapter 3: "Whoever believes in him" – in Jesus – "is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Now, what does Jesus say? You'll think I'm obsessed with ships and oceans, but let me tell you what he's not saying. He's not saying that life is like a cruise liner and that we're all heading off, every single one of us, to a beautiful place, and all you've got to do as you're on the voyage to this beautiful place is to pick the deck that you want to be on. You know, he's not saying that. He's not saying, 'If you fancy Christianity you can be on this deck, if you fancy another religion, go on this deck... In fact, if you just want to make it up yourself, your kind of DIY religion, it doesn't matter,

just get yourself entertained, find whatever works for you, and it'll be all okay.' He says it's not 'cruise liner', it is 'sinking ship'.

But what he is saying, and this is why it is so controversial today, he says there is only one lifeboat that will get us off. Now, he says that there are other lifeboats out there that are claiming to be able to rescue you, but Jesus, according to these words, is saying 'whoever believes in me, and me only, will not be condemned.' He says those other lifeboats that you see, they're not seaworthy. They're not going to save you at all.

So Jesus is not saying, 'I've come to tell you how to build your own lifeboat.' He hasn't said, 'I've come to give you instructions, and if you follow these, you can build your own boat and you can get off the ship.' It's not that at all. Jesus has come to speak the truth, and he is our lifeboat. He is the rescue. Now, he says there is only one lifeboat that is seaworthy, that can rescue us from the ship, and it is him. And as we saw before, we've got to step inside.

Now, that is so controversial, isn't it, in our culture, for Jesus to make such an exclusive claim? But here's the thing: we've got to realise that Jesus himself made the claim. So if we've got issues with it, and some people do have issues with it, who've we got issues with? Jesus himself. It's his words that say, 'I am the way to be rescued.' And yet I think this is really good news.

Don't you like certainty in the big things of life? I love certainty. When I've ever flown in a plane, and when the pilot comes on at the start of the journey and he's really confident, and he's really confident about how to take the thing off, and he's really confident about where he's going, and he seems to be really sure about how to land it, I don't start thinking, 'Ah, what an arrogant man that is. I can't believe we've got a pilot like that.'

What would you do if you were on a plane, and, you know, over the intercom at the beginning, some sort of nervous voice comes on and goes, 'Hiya! Um, I don't really sure how to get this off, and I don't really know what I'm doing, but I'm going to try and get it down.' What? No! No! We like certainty on things that matter to us.

So what about God? Relationship with God? Our eternal destiny? Well, those are huge things. So, though it is controversial, it is actually good that Jesus makes it really clear. So why should we believe him? Why should we believe that this is true? Well, two things I would say.

The identity of Jesus. Remember who he is. Remember revelation: Jesus claims to be able to speak from a vantage point of knowledge. He can speak the truth. He knows what he's talking about, and therefore he's not just guessing, making it up. He really knows what he's talking about. Therefore, we should listen to him. Even though it might not be popular, but just because something is popular doesn't mean it's right. It may not be popular, but Jesus can speak from a vantage point of knowledge.

And the other thing to remember is what Jesus did. Here is the eternal Son of God, and he has come on the most dramatic rescue mission of all, to die on a cross once and for all. If he had to do that, well, do you not think the situation was so serious that that was the only solution? How can there be any other solution if the eternal Son of God has to die in the way he did?

And remember what it's all for: so that we could have relationship with the God who made us. So what about other religions? Well, in the words of Jesus, he is claiming to be the unique saviour. But it's good news, because you, like me, want to know, 'How can I be reconnected with my Creator?' And Jesus says, 'Come to me as you are, put me in charge, and you can be reconnected, reunited with the God who made us.

Well, we're going to go back into our tables. Have a chat about that and see what you make of it.

Identity – Who is God? Who are we?

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