



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION TO SERMON SERIES: “CHRISTIANITY AND WORLD RELIGIONS”

Let me ask you a few questions to start out today. These are real easy. . .

1. Is every soft drink the same?
2. Is all fried chicken the same?
3. Is all music the same?
4. Is all make-up the same? [There’s Clinique, Elizabeth Arden, Estee Lauder, etc.]
5. Is every ice cream the same?
6. Is every car / house / mattress / hotel / shampoo / razor / toothpaste / college football team / teacher / church the same?

We all know those things are not the same. They look different, feel different, taste different, have different stuff in them.

TODAY we begin a new series of sermons following on the heels of the glorious Easter celebration we had last week.

LAST SUNDAY, we declared Jesus Christ to be the risen Lord (not just a sectarian prophet). . . the One who has conquered death and triumphed over the grave by the power of Almighty God.

Many of us here have committed our whole lives to this Jesus. We have staked our futures on the believed truth that HE is “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” [John 14:6]. But is He the only way? With so many other religions out there, does it come down to one being right. . . or all of them being right. . .or what?

And what about those who don’t believe as we do? What is their eternal destiny? How should we as Christians regard other religions?

These and a host of other questions are going to be on our minds in the next few weeks as we explore—I should say “scratch the surface”—of some of the world’s other religions.¹ These are the questions that you & I encounter day by day as we engage our culture and share our Christ. They come up at the cafeteria table. . .around the water cooler. . .in the classroom. . .in casual discussions with neighbors. . .and when you have friends over. Chances are our children will be around children of other faiths. . .will be presented the teachings of other religions in the classroom. . .and may be called upon to defend their faith.

These are tough issues. Ones we don’t often talk about in the church. What we want to do is:

1. Affirm the uniqueness of Jesus (we’ll be getting into what that means);
2. At the same time seek to have a right heart and attitude toward others.

¹ Some good resources to check out (ones which we pastors will rely heavily on in our preparation) are:
Christianity and World Religions by Adam Hamilton
The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey
Jesus Through the Ages by Jarislav Pelikan

A companion study to this sermon series—entitled *Knowing Jesus*—is being offered by Karl Fink during the 10:30 hour.

You know, that's what real *tolerance* is: striking the balance between holding onto our own convictions with a firm grip while at the same time treating others with a deep love and respect. We don't water down (or dilute) the truth of God's Word as it has come to us; neither do we mow down those who don't believe as we do.

I hope when we reach the end of this series that you will be a stronger Christian. Many feel insecure and uncomfortable when questions like these come up. We wonder, can my faith stand up under the questions, the scrutiny and the claims of other religions? Let it be affirmed at the outset that YES, our faith as Christians will stand up. It has for centuries.

As pastors, we want to send you out of here more confident than ever that Jesus is who He said He is and that you are on the path that leads to eternal life. . .and more prepared than ever to "*contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*". [Those are the words of **Jude (v. 3)**, the brother of James who wrote a tiny little epistle that appears toward the end of the New Testament.]

That means being more informed about other religions. . .more willing to listen with sensitivity until you really understand where they're coming from. . .more dedicated to building bridges with others (and not just writing them off as "lost"). . .more unswerving in a correct understanding to God's plan for redemption and how that is being played out in a pluralistic world. . .and more committed to being the light of Christ to those who are honestly seeking answers, sincerely searching and open to His claims.

In short, the purpose of this series of sermons is for all of us:

1. To become more confident in our own faith;
2. To have the right attitude toward those of other faiths;
3. To be equipped to share Christ with those who are ready.

A key Scripture is **I Peter 3:15** – "*Set apart Christ in your hearts as Lord and always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within you. . .and do this with gentleness and respect, all for the glory of God.*"

Finally, the words of the Apostle Paul in **Colossians 4:5-6** — "*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*"