



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**Christianity & World Religions: Christianity**

**May 13, 2007**

**Mother's Day)**

**Dr. Matthew J. Hook**

**John 3:16**

### **What am I trying to accomplish?**

- That people would be confident in their faith.

### **What am I trying to say?**

- That victors can afford to be generous. Few things bother me as much on a sports field as seeing a victor taunt a loser after they've won. That's as petty as they come. They've already won. They can afford to be generous! Because of Jesus, you and I are victors! You can have confidence that the Creator of the universe cares about you personally. It's what Jesus came to show us. And you can live your life generously.
- You might say "Sure you can be confident—you the pastor! You've been to seminary! (Not exactly something that I'd put my confidence in!) ☺"
- The truth is, I'm a full-time pastor and a part-time follower of Jesus. I'm a normal guy who struggles, whose life has been touched by Jesus. I get terrified sometimes on Sunday mornings. I blow it. I feel like *half* the dad and husband I *should* be. I don't pray well enough. I don't lead as I should. I don't budget my time responsibly. I know, I know. We say "Christianity's not a religion it's a relationship." So okay—my relationship with God is often not what it should be! But I'm *still* here to tell you that you and I can be confident in our faith, because victors can afford to be generous. We're victors—not over anyone else or anyone else's religion. We're victors over life and death, thanks to Jesus Christ.

We've been looking at world religions to grow in our understanding, and to learn to be confident in our own faith. Are you confident of Christianity? The opposite of confident is unsure. Uneasy. All that is, is a dead giveaway as to what I'm spending my time thinking about—myself! Even if I'm thinking bad thoughts, they're about ME! That's not humility—that's a sick sense of pride. We can only be confident when our focus and faith is on Jesus Christ our Lord. Then we can have full confidence and victory—which allows us to be generous in our relationships and in life. Because we know that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord!

We've been studying world religions since the week after Easter, and it's been pretty cool. We've looked at some amazing things about how they each got started and some of their most basic beliefs. We've done it from the framework of Christianity, and there is much more to learn. But the reason we're not taking a whole year is because many of us need to study Christianity. We need to study our first language before we can comprehend learning a second language. Our faith is so rich, and deep, and meaningful, I'm ready to dive right back in. And our faith isn't just an intellectual exercise. It's about worshiping God with our hands and feet and heart too, as we seek to follow our faith by reaching out in love and care to the world. You simply can't separate loving your neighbor from worshiping God. Because victors can afford to be generous.

And that's why my goal today is for each of us to be a bit more confident our Christian faith, even in a discussion of world religions. And hear me clearly: When I say "Victors can afford to be generous", I'm not talking about victors over other religions. I'm talking about the victory of Jesus Christ over death. That God

is the victor over the creation. And once that's settled, you know it's not about you. And because Jesus Christ is the victor, you and I as His followers can afford to be generous. So many issues would be settled in life if we truly let this sink in.

You can be confident in Christianity, because Jesus Christ is the victor. It only works when your focus is on Jesus. Thus, if you're not spending your time focusing on yourself and worrying about yourself, you'll be so much freer to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself, (remembering your neighbor is also your mom, dad, wife, husband, and kids).

When you give your life over to Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in you. And it gets even better: You don't have to come up with the love, or joy, or peace, or patience yourself. All those really good things don't have to come from you. Now they come through you. Take love for example. The most important thing about love you have to know is that you don't have to manufacture it. God is the source of love. He wants His love to flow through you. 1 John 4:7 *"Let us love one another, for love comes from God."*

This is the source of our confidence. It's not about us! That's good news for moms, dads, aunts, uncles, and pastors. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are from God. Now, and for the rest of your life, you don't have to manufacture them. Our task is not to produce love, but to pass it along. It means we've got to stay connected to the Source and then let it fly. Don't hang on to it—give it away. 1 John 4:9-12 continues: *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another...if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us."* What a privilege!

So, why don't we have more confidence? Because the truth is, every single one of us who's sitting politely listening and is one decision away from moral, financial, and marital ruin. We've been playing with fire. We haven't been generous because we lost our focus on the Creator who loves you personally. Some of you are considering options with major consequences: Wives whose schedules are unsustainable. Couples who are drowning in a sea of debt. Teens who are here because you've been forced to come. Young men and women who have been called all sorts of terrible labels, and idea that they are as valuable as their outward appearance.

So what are we going to do? Be generous—towards what God is passionate about. Be generous toward others. Drop the other stuff. God knows how hard your life is. How lonely you might feel right now. How overwhelmed you are. And God knows how you medicate yourself. But remember: Victors can afford to be generous. You've won, okay? You can afford to be generous. You can have confidence: the Creator of the universe is crazy about you! You are His treasure. He paid the priceless amount of His own Son that you could belong to Him! That's the benchmark of Christianity. (I've always wanted to hold a John 3:16 sign up).

Christianity offers truth about God, ourselves, and salvation. That God is victorious and God desires a love relationship with us. And calls for a response from us. In Hinduism, salvation is found in learning, over lifetime after lifetime, and in perfecting yourself. In Buddhism, it's through meditation over thousands of lifetimes as you let go of desire. In Islam, you yield yourself wholly to God and pray, fast, pursue a pilgrimage, and live the Quran law. In Judaism, salvation is pursuing the Law of Moses and the Talmud, and doing good deeds to be holy. In all these other faiths, salvation is squarely on our shoulders: by working harder, learning more, or eliminating desire. Christianity, on the other hand, says we *cannot* save ourselves. God says "I will save you and set you free. Your job is to just receive it as a gift. May this gift transform your life and move you to live in grateful response. On the merits of my Son, you are now a victor...and victors can afford to be generous.

It's Mother's Day—"What would my mom say?" Does she know with Jesus she's won? Does she know that you've experienced God's victory? (How weird to share your faith with your mom!) Does she know that each of her children can be victorious through Jesus Christ? When was the last time you called your mother? When was the last time you talked to God? (Prayer) For some of us, it might mean talking to God to give us the strength to talk to our mothers. Then, maybe in prayer, you'll remember that you don't have to have the

strength in you to do it; but through prayer you've opened up the possibility of God's strength flowing through you.

Imagine what the world would look like if all the Christ-followers claimed Jesus' victory over their lives and claimed the truth that victors can be generous? Today, think of 3 ways you can be generous to people around you—by your words, your time, your attention, and your gifts.