

An Exclusive Savior? Matthew 11:25-27

Introduction

There is perhaps no more significant, contemporary challenge to the Christian faith than the objection to its exclusive claim that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. In conversation, people quickly make comments like these: "How can only people who believe in Jesus Christ go to heaven?" Or, "Why can't a sincere Buddhist go to be with God in heaven?" Or, "Isn't this claim about Jesus being the only way really arrogance in disguise? Isn't this really about power?"

I wish these were simply academic smokescreens, but they are not. These sorts of questions have put profound pressure on Christians to change their views. By 1983 in Vancouver, the World Council of Churches, for example, radically changed its view about the need to evangelize the world:

In the end, the great communities of faith will not have disappeared. None will have "won" over the others. Jews will still be Jews; Muslims still Muslims; and those of the great Eastern faiths still Buddhists or Hindus or Taoists. Africa will still witness to its traditional life view; China to its inheritance. People will still come from the East and the West, the North and the South and sit down in the kingdom of God without having first become "Christians" like us. (Michael Green, Evangelism Through the Local Church, p. 46)

One must recognize, however, that such attempts at recasting the claims of the Christian faith are not rooted in an effort to be faithful to the Scriptures or the historic Christian faith. Rather, they are attempts to accommodate the secular culture. In fact, one would have to throw out virtually the whole Bible or subvert its entire message to get away from its exclusive call to faith in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity. Softening or denying this message doesn't modify Christianity, it amounts to a demolition.

Today we live in a world that would in fact prefer to do away with the exclusive claims of the Christian faith. Today we live in a world that wants to affirm that everyone's personal conviction is their "personal truth." "Everyone is right and no one is wrong," we like to say (except, of course, those who make exclusive claims about Jesus Christ). However, this sort of pluralism really amounts to a denial of "truth" in any significant sense. If everything is choice, then nothing is really true. Thankfully, we don't abide by this principle when driving to work. Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone said that for me today red will be green and green will be red?

Religious pluralism may be superficially attractive, but it doesn't really satisfy the deeper questions we have about life? Where is hope? Is there salvation? What is my purpose? Do I have a future? Why would I trust in myself when I'm the one with all of the questions?

And herein lays the great strength of the Christian faith. Yes, the Christian faith makes an exclusive claim about Jesus Christ. But it does so in order to bring "good news" not bad news.

Main Idea: Therefore, if we are to really understand the value of these exclusive claims we must seek to understand how they have become "good news." Because the other thing we can be sure of is that Christianity purports to offer "good news" for our lives today.

In our passage this morning we see these twin ideas merge together. Jesus' claim of exclusivity is merged with his invitation of hope for a broken world. We will look more next week at his offer of hope, but this week I want to focus on Jesus' exclusive claims.

Key Question: So, in our world where pluralism reigns, how can Jesus' exclusive claim be "good news?"

Let's examine Jesus' claims.

1) Jesus lays claim to divine prerogatives (27)

Up to this point in our study of Matthew, Jesus has already made claims of divinity. He has forgiven sins as only God can forgive. He has controlled nature as only God can control nature. He has exercised authority over the demonic as only God can. However, these claims are more implicit than explicit. In other words, they are more subtle. To see them you have to look for them.

However, here Jesus makes some pretty explicit claims to be one with God. He lays claim to divine prerogatives:

- **Know God in a unique way (all things, no one knows the Father except the Son)**
The focus here is on the complete knowledge the Son has of the Father, but "all things" is comprehensive. It also extends to Jesus' divine authority. Jesus has God's knowledge and God's power.
- **Reveal God in a unique way (no one knows the Father, except who the Son chooses to reveal him to)**
Here Jesus claims to be the unique revealer of the Father. No one comes to a true knowledge of God apart from the will/decision of Jesus Christ. In other words, God is sovereign in our coming to know him. We don't know God apart from God's divine will. If we do have a true knowledge of God it is only because God has first revealed himself to us.

2) Jesus' claim clarifies where hope is found (25)

By informing us of his unique role in the plan of salvation, Jesus makes it very clear where we should look to find hope. Jesus is the way God effects this sovereign will. As the one who knows all things and who can reveal salvation from God, the Father, there is only one person on whom we should focus our attention. That person is Jesus Christ.

Make no mistake about it, God is sovereign over salvation. Only those who have had their eyes opened by God's divine grace are able to discern these truths. However, God's sovereignty does not derail our responsibility. God does not leave us in a fog of uncertainty about how salvation can be entered into.

Calvin Quote:

For many, when they hear that none are heirs of eternal life save those whom God chose before the foundation of the world, ask anxiously how they can know about the secret counsel of God. And so they enter into a labyrinth and can find no way out. But Christ tells them to come straight to Him and seek assurance of salvation in Him. ...Foolish people contrast these two as if they were contraries. Although our salvation is always hidden in God, yet Christ is the conduit through whom it flows to us and is received by faith, so that it is firm and certain in our hearts. (Calvin's Commentary, A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark & Luke, Vol. 2, pp. 23-24)

While affirming God's sovereignty, Jesus also affirms the means by which we enter into that salvation. We enter into Jesus' saving hope by looking solely to Jesus. How do I come to know that I have experienced God's sovereign salvation? Not by seeking out philosophical uncertainties. Rather, my hope comes into focus when I make my hope Jesus Christ.

Without this exclusive claim made by Jesus, how would we know where to go to find hope? Jesus tells us hope is found in him in order for us to fix our gaze upon him.

Illustration: The lighthouse in the midst of stormy waters is not arrogant for rising high above the crashing waves with its blazing light. Rather, it orients sailors in the midst of the raging sea. It shows them where to guide their vessels.

In the same way, there is nothing arrogant about Christ making these claims if what the Bible says about humanity's plight is true. If humanity is "fast bound in sin and nature's might," then the "quickenning ray" of Jesus light is our only hope.

I spoke with someone earlier this week about this issue. It is silly to argue about the majority arriving at the truth when they are all on an airplane that has lost its engines and is falling out of the sky. In that situation you don't want a *debate about the truth* you want *someone who knows the truth* to rescue you. Whether it is finding a parachute or someone who can restart the engines, you just want someone who *knows how to save you*. If one person knows then one person is enough! **Jesus is that one person who makes where salvation is found very clear.**

3) Jesus' exclusive claim makes way for a new inclusivism (25-26)

Jesus tells us in verse 25 exactly who those people are who come to see Jesus as not only Divine, but also their saving hope. He calls them infants. He also tells us that the way of salvation is closed to the "wise and learned." Literally, it is hidden from them. Of course, the wise and learned here are not the intellectuals, but the independent, the self-sufficient and self-assured. The babes here are not literally babies, but rather those who come to have dependent trust in Jesus Christ. They are the poor in spirit.

Salvation from God is found in Jesus Christ alone. However, this salvation is freely offered to all who will receive it. This is how this exclusive claim really becomes good news for the "poor" in spirit, those who have forsaken themselves. Jesus tells us that those who have come to need the grace offered by Jesus Christ—the weak, the dependent, the humble, the poor—are the ones who truly come to receive it. And who rejects it? The self-sufficient, right?

Important implication

The Kingdom of Heaven is an inclusive kingdom for the weak. The only ones excluded are those who want to come to God on their own terms and in their own righteousness. In other words, the only ones who are excluded are those who believe they can save themselves.

This is an important and it often goes unnoticed by those who reject the exclusive claims of Christianity. The truth is that they have often unknowingly embraced an exclusive principle. The saved aren't those who "get their lives together."

Conclusion

Believing Jesus was God who is the unique way of salvation is hard for some of us to believe, right? However, for most of us we have no problem viewing him as the most perfect man who ever lived. It is interesting, but almost everybody who objects to Jesus being the only way of salvation will affirm that Jesus was a wonderful person. Jesus is the perfect man. He lived a life of selfless devotion. He was the ideal of humanity. He was a person we should all strive to be. He embodied all that is good.

You'll get no argument from me about these statements. Jesus is in fact the perfect representation of our humanity. He did indeed live a life of love. He did in fact give up his life because he loved us. But Jesus, as we have seen this morning also claimed divine prerogatives for himself. He claimed to be not only man, but also God.

C.S. Lewis tri-lemma is well known for how dealing the objection to Jesus' divinity. Either Jesus was a liar, lunatic or lord. Lewis' point is that good person would not knowingly make Jesus' claims if they weren't true. If he did he would be a liar. Or, if Jesus was a lunatic, a deluded fool, then he doesn't deserve our devotion. Therefore, the door is closed to Jesus being simply an ideal human. Only liars and lunatics make the sorts of claims Jesus made. Good people don't make these sorts of claims.

But Jesus did in fact make these sorts of claims. And we do think he was a good man. So what gives? What gives is that Jesus is both uniquely God and man in one person. He alone is the way of salvation for all who will look to him. He is both sovereign and exclusive. But, only an exclusive and real Savior can make it clear and welcome all who will truly come. This Jesus has really done that for us!