

The Uniqueness of Jesus

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[0 : 00] I'm Pastor Brian. It's lovely to be back in Kuching.

I met many of you at the church camp last year, so it's a great joy to renew that friendship and to share with you on this most important topic of reaching the world with the gospel.

So let's pray and commit this next time to the Lord. Father, thank you that your word is living and active. We pray this morning your word will pierce deeply into our hearts and our souls and our minds.

We pray again you will thrill us with the gospel and give us a deep and passionate resolve to make Jesus known throughout the world for the sake of his glory.

Amen. There are two men in America who are magicians. They go by the name Penn and Teller.

[1 : 15] They do magic shows and they have a program on television. One of them, Penn Gillette, is both a famous magician and an outspoken atheist.

He tells of a time he did a magic show with Mr. Teller. After the show, a man came up to him, a well-dressed man, a very nice man, a polite man, and thanked Penn for the show and how much he enjoyed it.

And he said to Penn, I want to give you something. And he gave him a pocket New Testament with the Psalms.

And he'd written in this New Testament. And Penn said he was very nice. He was a businessman. And he wasn't crazy.

In fact, Penn was moved by the man's gesture. You can watch this on video. It's amazing what he then says. He says, This man was kind and sane and looked me in the eyes and talked to me and then gave me this Bible.

[2 : 34] Penn, the atheist, then said, I've always said, I don't respect people who evangelize, who don't evangelize. I don't respect that at all.

If you believe there is a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever and you think it's not really worth telling them because it might be socially awkward, then he said, the atheist, how much do you have to hate somebody not to evangelize?

How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? He said, he gave an example, if I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you did not believe it, that that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point when I tackle you and this is more important than that.

This guy was a really good guy. He was polite, honest and sane. He cared enough about me to evangelize and give me a Bible.

Now, I find that stunning. Here's an atheist saying, if you love me, tell me about Jesus. I may say no, but at least tell me if you love me and don't be embarrassed.

[4 : 19] Well, this morning, let's look at a verse, a very famous verse, which I think causes us Christians some embarrassment. Perhaps we wish Jesus hadn't said this or said this quite as bluntly as he did.

That I am the way, the truth, and the life. That is, if you want to go to heaven, you must go through me and through no one else.

Now, that strikes us, I think, and not just us other people as incredibly arrogant. To say that you alone are the way to God, that's just, that's just arrogant.

But here's our problem. When you look at Jesus, does he strike you as being arrogant? Mr. Trump thinks he's the greatest ever American president.

That sounds a bit arrogant. But actually, I'm not that surprised he thinks that. So I look at Mr. Trump and I think, that kind of fits.

[5 : 34] He seems a fairly arrogant man. Does Jesus seem to you like a fairly arrogant man? Well, far from it. I think he's probably the world's most humble man.

In fact, the virtue of humility began with Jesus. It didn't really exist before him. For all those years before Christ came, you would bow down before your God or your gods.

Or you'd bow down before your social superior. You'd bow down before your Lord or your master or your teacher. You'd never bow down and serve your social equal, let alone your social inferior until Jesus came.

When Jesus came, it was the birth of social humility. Right before these words here, in chapter 13, we're told our Lord got up from the table, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, got on his knees, and washed the feet of his disciples.

Totally unheard of. Almost outrageous. Then later, of course, he hangs on a cross to give his life for his social inferiors.

[7 : 07] that is the humility of Jesus. How can a man like that, then, make a statement which sounds so arrogant?

People of mine are saying, well, look, it works for me. I find my faith very satisfying. It works for me. Maybe it worked for you. That's fine. But don't tell me I've got to believe this.

Don't tell me you're right and all the world is wrong. Don't say that. That's arrogant. I want to think about this verse in its context and its importance for us in world mission and to look at the context.

This is part of our Lord's, what's called our Lord's farewell sermon. They're in the upper room. In a few hours' time, he'll be arrested, tried, and executed.

They'll be for the disciples from some very, very dark and sad days ahead. So, all he says in these chapters through to chapter 17 is to prepare them for these days of darkness.

[8 : 28] He says again and again, he's going away to the Father. I'm going away. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't be sorrowful. I'm going away but I'm coming back.

Then we have in chapter 14 this lovely picture, verse 2. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, I would have told you I'm going away to prepare a place for you.

I'm going away to prepare a room for you. Now the old King James version had in my Father's house are many mansions. Maybe you have this vision in your mind of there for you in heaven is your own palace of Versailles.

Your own White House. Your own Buckingham Palace. Your own Downton Abbey. All there with your name on it. But the word is simply the word room.

It's just a living space. You find the same word in verse 23 of this chapter. If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching.

[9 : 40] My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home or make our room with him. It's a picture of intimate dwelling. You find the same word in chapter 15 or the verbal form.

Remain in me. Abide in me and I'll abide in you. Or literally room with me and I will room with you.

It's just a dwelling place. So we normally think it means this. Jesus saying I'm going away to heaven I'll be there a while then I'll come back take you with me to a home I prepared for you.

It's a bit like you're engaged to someone in Kuching. You say honey I'm just going to Melbourne to find a lovely apartment by the Yarra River for us.

I'll be away a while I'll come back to Kuching we'll get married and then go and live by the Yarra River in Melbourne in our new home. That's the kind of picture we have of a Lord coming back at the Second Coming.

[10 : 54] But that's not what he's talking about. The room we live in is here and now. What's he say in verse 23?

If anyone loves me we'll come to him and make our home with him or her now. chapter 15 remain in me now.

Abide in me now. When he says in my father's house are many rooms he simply means right now in God's presence there's lots of room.

I'm about to die on the cross and by my death on the cross make the way open for you to come into God's presence. The curtain is torn in two now all can come into God's presence and there's room for everyone.

In God's presence there's many rooms. There's room for people from the Philippines, Myanmar, Australia, China, lots of room in God's presence now through our Lord's death.

[12:09] Plenty of room. So it's not a reference to heaven, though we'll be there, it's speaking about here and now. In my father's house where I dwell is room for everyone.

He's talking about going and coming and the disciples found all this talk about going away confusing and they ask him questions. Thomas says where are you going? Are you going to Galilee or Samaria? Philip says Lord, show us the father. But it's Thomas' question which is the key one. Where are you going?

But they've missed the point. I'm going, he says, to the father. Then that great statement, I am the way to the father because he is the son.

And if you read John's gospel, you read again and again that Jesus is the only son of God. Now in a sense, all people are God's offspring.

[13:20] God made them all in a broad sense. You and I are God's special children. We've been born again, we've been adopted into his family, we are his sons and daughters.

But we are not the son. God's God's God's relationship with God like no one else.

If you read the gospel carefully, you see, our Lord never invites us to pray to God together as our father.

He says to the disciples, he's my father, father, he's your father, but not together our father.

After he rises from the dead, he meets Mary Magdalene. He says to her, tell my disciples, I'm ascending to your God and to my God, to your father and to my father.

[14:29] We have the same God, the same father, but not the same relationship. We are God's sons and daughters by adoption, by grace.

He's God's son by nature from eternity. Same father, different relationship. Therefore he, the unique son, and he alone can show us the father.

He's come from the father. He alone knows the father. Now, you don't know my father. You've never met him.

And you can't because he's dead. But let's assuming he was alive. Now, you could look at me and draw some conclusions about my father.

You conclude, of course, he's Caucasian. He's white. He's tall. He's handsome. You draw certain conclusions, wouldn't you, by looking at the son?

[15:39] And when you look at God's creation, you can draw some conclusions about God. To have made a universe, he must be very powerful. To give us such abundance, he must be very good.

But what my father is like, what's his personality? What are his likes and dislikes? I, the son, would have to tell you.

Because only I know my father. Or the more so with Jesus. What's God like? What's God's likes and dislikes?

How do you know God? The son would have to tell you. He's the way to God. He alone, because he is the son, is the truth about God.

And therefore, in him is life eternal. My mother-in-law worked for nearly 40 years as a missionary evangelist in Pakistan in a mission hospital.

[16:53] And one time a woman came to the hospital. She was sick. She lived in a remote village. And she'd had, some days before, a dream.

And a man in white appeared to her and said to her, go to the hospital in Kalundrabad. I don't think she'd even heard of the place.

Go to the hospital in Kalundrabad, said the man dressed in white. She went there, she met my mother-in-law, received medication and health, and found the man in white.

She found the Lord Jesus, and found eternal life. Because in him is life. The way, the truth, the life. I think one of our most, I hope, beloved and cherished of all verses, but hated by the world.

[18:03] But can't you see the world now is stuck in a conundrum? How can it be that a man, by his life and character, is so humble, and brings to our world the virtue of social humility, can say something which sounds so arrogant and self-deluded?

How can that be? How do you bring those two together? The answer is only one way. What he said about himself is true.

He is the way, he's just speaking the truth. He's the way, the truth, and the life. You see, to make an exclusive claim is not arrogant necessarily, if the claim is true.

My youngest daughter has diabetes. She's had diabetes for 17 years. It's not a nice disease. It could be fatal. Let's say I was to discover a cure for diabetes. diabetes. That would be a great discovery. I could be very arrogant. I could call it the rater vaccine. I could patent it and make a lot of money.

[19 : 30] I could say to the world, I deserve the Nobel Prize. I could be thoroughly arrogant. But that's not the issue. The issue is, have I found the cure to diabetes?

If I have, I'm the way to get your diabetes dealt with. If I have, I have the truth about diabetes and I can bring you a better life.

in that regard, I am the way, the truth and the life. And the arrogance is neither here nor there. The question is, is this true? Is Jesus alone the unique Son of God? Did he alone die on the cross and his death brought salvation to many?

Did he conquer death? Does he alone have the right to determine the eternal destiny of every man, woman and child?

[20 : 53] The answer is yes. Let me say two things from this. First of all, we must affirm Christ's uniqueness.

Our problem is the English language is changing. Words change their meaning. The obvious one is the word gay.

Gay used to mean merry, happy. It now means having same-sex attraction. The word has changed. changed. The other word has changed is the word literally.

Literally once meant literally. It doesn't mean that now. I heard a woman say some months ago, my heart was in my mouth literally.

literally. I thought, madam, if your heart was in your mouth literally, you'd be dead literally. What you mean is metaphorically.

[22 : 03] The word changes its meaning. The other word that changes is the word awesome. Now, awesome once meant full of fear and wonder and dread.

how was your yum cha last night? Oh, it was awesome. No, it wasn't. It was tasty and hot.

It wasn't awesome. How's your pastor Brian? Oh, he's awesome. No, he's not awesome. He's a good preacher and faithful and kind.

He's not awesome. God alone is awesome. The other word that's changed is the word unique.

Now, unique once meant one of a kind, unequaled, by himself or herself alone, no longer.

You hear things like, oh, she's a really unique sports player. Like, really unique? How are you really unique? How are you more unique than other unique people?

[23 : 11] You can't be really unique. You're either unique and the rest aren't. Today, the word unique means special. Is Jesus just special?

No, he's not just special. He's like no other religious teacher. They're all dead. He's alive.

He's the judge of all the world. He is the unique Son of God, the unique Savior, the one uniquely worthy of praise and worship and obedience.

He is unique. And therefore, secondly, we must preach him. I began with the story of an atheist.

I want to end with the story of another atheist. In 2008, a man called Matthew Paris, who writes for the Times in London, wrote an article.

[24 : 24] The title was Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest need.

Matthew Paris is an atheist. He just said, Africa's biggest need is missionaries.

He grew up in Africa. He wrote this. Before Christmas, I returned after 45 years to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland.

Today, it's Malawi. And the Times' Christmas Appeal includes a small British charity working there. Pump Aid helps rural communities to install a simple pump, letting people keep their village wells sealed and clean.

I went to see this work. It inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in development charities. But traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief, one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood.

[26 : 02] It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa, sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects, and international aid efforts.

These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa, Christianity changes people's hearts.

It brings a spiritual transformation, the rebirth is real, the change is good. In the city we had working for us Africans, who had converted, and were strong believers, the Christians were always different. Far from being cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated them and released them. They stood tall. At 24, traveling by land across the continent, reinforced this impression.

[27 : 35] From Algiers to Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, then right through the Congo to Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya, wherever we entered a territory, worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to.

Something in their eyes, the way they approached you, direct man to man, without looking down or away. He is an atheist, unembarrassed by Christian evangelism.

We shouldn't be either. It's the best news in the world that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.

man alone changes lives. In North Africa, a Muslim became a Christian and his friends were angry. They said, why have you done that? He said, well, imagine you're walking down a road and the road forks and you don't know which way to go and by that road are two men.

[29 : 19] One is dead and one is alive. which one would you ask to show you the way?

Jesus said, I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. So my beloved friends, believe him, follow him, and preach him.

Let me pray.