

Text: Romans 8:18-31

Title: "Buddhism: Too Attached"

Introduction: This week we continue our series, "World Religions and the Gospel Truth". Again, I think that it is important as Christians for us to be informed as we live in this world. One of the things that Jesus commanded His followers to do was to "go into all the world and make disciples" for Him. We are to invite all people to go face-to-face with Jesus Christ and hopefully they will make a decision for Him as their personal Savior and Lord. We are told to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them what we know of God's Word and challenge them to grow in their faith.

In order to carry out that command, we have to understand the people we are inviting. We need to know the culture and background of people and their beliefs.

Last week we talked about the Hindu religion, its history, its beliefs and how it compares to Christianity. This week we move on to our second of five World Religions, Buddhism.

Please understand that much like different beliefs between the denominations of Christianity, there are many different beliefs under the label "Buddhism", but because of our time restraints, I will have to be pretty general. I hope and pray that what we have to say about Buddhism will help us to grow in our faith. Like our study of Hinduism, our study of Buddhism will probably reveal some things that we, as Christians, could learn about faith and conduct.

At this time, I invite you to take the blue insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other you will find an outline of how we are going to approach the religion of Buddhism ... complete with fill-in-the-blanks. My hope is that you hear or see something on the screen in these next few minutes that will help you clarify what you believe and why you believe it. As you fill in the blanks and jot down whatever other notes you need, I hope that these are helpful to solidify your faith or help you talk to others on their faith journey.

Before we go any further, let's read our Scripture for today. It is from Romans 8. This is Paul writing to the Roman church to encourage those people to fight through their persecution and suffering. Here's what Paul writes:

READ ROMANS 8:18-31 NOW AND PRAY!

I. The Story of Buddha

- A. The Buddhist religion begins with a man. Siddhartha Gautama was born in India around 563BC to a small kingdom prince. Siddhartha's father was very protective of his son and kept him inside the walls of his kingdom.
- B. We need to know that the world that Siddhartha lived was heavily influenced by the Hindu faith. Remember that few Hindus had a sense of personal touch with God, so for Sid and his family, there was probably not a sense of closeness of God or God caring for them.

- C. Siddhartha lived in luxury, was married around the age of 16 and later had a son. But, over time, Sid's curiosity got the best of him. He wanted to know what was outside; "What was the rest of the world like?" So, when he was 29 years old, Sid asked his charioteer to take him into the city so he could see how others lived.
1. 1st trip = saw an older man, decrepit, and asked, "Is this the fate of all people?" Response, "Yes, all people grow old." Made Siddhartha struggle and think deeply.
 2. 2nd trip = saw a man who was very sick / almost to the point of death, and asked, "Is this the fate of all people?" Response, "Yes, all people get sick at some time." Again, this made Siddhartha sad and thoughtful.
 3. 3rd trip = saw a funeral procession. He had never seen a dead person before and asked, "Is this the fate of all people?" Response, "Yes, all people die."
- D. Well, Siddhartha felt what we call "angst". Angst is a dread or anxiety about the inevitable suffering of humanity.
1. I think most of us have felt that at some point or another—when we realize our mortality.
 2. We get sick ... we turn gray ... we lose our hair ... we get tired more quickly ... things creak ... all reminders that this body is not going to last forever.
- E. When Siddhartha Gautama experienced this for the first time at the age of 29, he looked at his wife and son one last time and snuck out of the palace to go and find answers to what he was feeling. Remember he did not feel a connection to God through the Hindu religion, so he did not feel like he could count on God.
1. He started with the idea that he would take on the monastic life and deprive his body. He got down to eating one grain of rice a day, but still felt angst ... it wasn't working.
 2. Because he understood that living in luxury and having everything you want didn't take away the angst, he decided to find a middle ground. He began living in moderation. He still found no comfort.
 3. But, when he was around 35, after 6 years on his journey, Siddhartha had a revelation or insight into how to let go of his angst. While meditating under a tree, he fell into a deep trance and saw the world like he'd never seen it before.
 4. When he awoke, Sid felt that he had seen what he thought the source of all suffering and a way to overcome it. He had reached, what he called, enlightenment. The Pali word for enlightenment is "budh". Siddhartha had become "Buddha" or, the enlightened one.
 5. Buddha spent the next 45 years inviting others to follow his way. He had found a philosophical and meditative way to

deliver people from suffering and free them from the cycle of reincarnation.

6. He never claimed to be a god; just a man who had found a way to overcome suffering.

II. Essential **Buddhist** Beliefs

The Buddha had found a way to deal with suffering and the anxieties that come with it ... what was this way? Let's look at some Essential Buddhist Beliefs:

A. **Non-Theistic**

1. Buddhism is the only World Religion that does not claim to have a god. It's not that Buddha was atheistic. It wasn't that he didn't believe there is a god; it just didn't seem relevant to Buddha. For him, human suffering and God were not connected ... he had no personal relationship or understanding of God.
2. So, Buddhists don't worship Buddha as a god, but they think very highly of him as a teacher and man.
3. Let's learn what Siddhartha figured out in his moment of revelation...

B. **The Four Noble Truths** ... 4 things about life that are certain.

1. Dukkha = Suffering is a part of life. People get sick, they get hurt, accidents happen, hearts break when we lose loved ones, child-birth is painful, etc.
2. Tanha = Suffering is caused by "attachments". According to Buddha, we only suffer because we are so attached to the things of this world ... our material possessions, our families, our health, our life. We crave love, so we hurt when we don't get it or lose it. We crave food, so we hurt when we don't get it, etc.
3. We Can Overcome our Attachments = This is done through detachment or dispassion (convincing ourselves that we are not attached to the things of life). If we can fully convince ourselves through meditation that we do not desire the cravings of life, we can end the cycle of reincarnation—suffering ceases.
4. The Holy Eightfold Path is the Way to Overcome Suffering = As people follow this path, the cravings of this life will lessen.

C. **The Holy Eight-fold Path** ... 8 ways to become detached from people, places, things, hopes and dreams.

1. Right Views
2. Right Intentions
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood

6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration
9. For the first six (6) this is about building good karma and avoiding bad karma (Hinduism). Most Christians would agree with these six also.
10. The last two? These are about controlling our fears and anxieties through meditation.
11. According to most Buddhists these eight qualities would be seen as ideals. One would not achieve them until they attained Nirvana.

D. *Karma, Samsara, and Nirvana*

1. Siddhartha did not embrace the theology of the Hindu faith, but he did adopt some of the beliefs:
2. He agreed with our good and bad deeds resulting in matching karma.
 - a. *Bad karma* = return to lower form of life (animal, etc.)
 - b. *Good karma* = reincarnated into a more positive state.
3. Buddha also accepted the concept of *samsara* ... the belief that immediately following one's death they were transferred to the conception of a child. Endless reincarnation cycle until one achieved nirvana.
4. *Nirvana* means "extinction" ... like snuffing out a flame. It means for Buddhists the end of the cycle of reincarnation.
5. Remember that Hinduism teaches that nirvana is when one's soul becomes one with God.
6. Buddhism says that we have no soul. The journey ends with the snuffing out of any sense of our personal identity. Nirvana is when one no longer exists in Buddhism.

III. Differences Between Christianity and Buddhism

- A. ***Buddhist Sacred Writings*** ... much of what is recorded in the Buddha's sacred writings could fit into the wisdom literature of our Bibles. Listen:
1. Dhammapada verse 100, Buddha said, "Better than a thousand useless words is one single word that gives peace."
 2. Some sounds like Jesus in the New Testament. Dhammapada, verse 5, "Hate is not conquered by hate. Hate is conquered by love. This law is eternal."
 3. And verse Dhammapada 133 sounds like it came right out of the Book of James in our Bibles, "Never speak harsh words, for they may come back to you."
 4. Christians and Buddhists can certainly agree on some of their sayings. Christians can admire the Buddha's teachings on

taking time to meditate and on not being attached to things that do not last.

5. But, although Christians and Buddhists can agree on some things, there are three very important things in which there is no harmony.

B. *God*

1. The greatest differences between Buddhism and Christianity are at the starting point of these faiths.
2. Buddha had a picture of an unattainable, unknowable life source as God through the Hindu faith. So, he looked for the answer to the problem of suffering outside of God. He looked instead to human effort to control the mind and desires.
3. Again, Buddha did not deny God, God was just irrelevant for Buddha.
4. On the other hand, God is at the very center of Christianity. God is Creator of the universes, planets, world we live in and all that is in it ... including you and I created in God's image.
5. We are God's children and we can know God personally ... that's what God wants!
6. Through God's Son, Jesus, God truly revealed God's self to us ... became vulnerable to us, set an example for us and died for us ... because of LOVE!
7. God gave us a path to follow, but it's not eightfold; there are just two commandments to the path of life. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind ... A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"
8. God does not turn away from suffering, but instead experiences suffering on our behalf. "God bore the weight of our bad karma on the cross and credited to us Jesus' righteousness or good karma." (p.61)
9. God sent the Holy Spirit to give us comfort within the suffering of this world...

C. *Human Suffering*

1. Buddhists focus on suffering as the primary human condition, whereas Christians see suffering as one of many conditions we experience in life.
2. We do agree that suffering is a very real part of life. People grow old. Our bodies die. And, some controlling of the mind can help lower the anxiety.
3. I kind of agree with the idea that we need to be able to have control over our worry about the things of this world. The difference with Christianity is that when Jesus taught that we are not supposed to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear; when Jesus taught that God knows you need those things and as long as we seek God's Kingdom first we will

be taken care of ... it didn't say anything about being detached. Actually, the challenge is to attach ourselves to God first!

4. We are made to be attached to family and friends and spouses and children and life itself. BUT, with all these attachments comes suffering. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me."
5. Romans 8 tells us that the sufferings of this life do not compare with the glory of the next. It's worth it.
6. We, as Christians do not believe that all suffering is caused by attachments either. Suffering also happens because people do bad things. Evil in this world is real.
7. Suffering can also be used for good. Jesus embraced the suffering of the cross and the apostles rejoiced when they were persecuted and jailed. They were worthy to suffer in the name of Christ ... and more people came to know Jesus.
8. Relief from anxiety in Christianity comes from TRUSTING in the God who loves us more than we know.
9. Christians find the answer to suffering here in the peace of God that passes all of our understanding guarded by Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:6-7).

D. Life after Death

1. For Buddhists the ultimate goal is that our being is passed from life to life until we become good enough to become kind of extinct ... snuffed out ... no more 'you'.
2. In Christianity, we believe the words of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in my will never die, but live into eternity (John 11:25)."
3. Jesus came and lived and died and lived again to show us that after this life we are not snuffed out or reborn as another being. Instead, our thoughts and memories and all that makes us who we are continue to exist (if we have accepted the Lord's gift of salvation). We go to a place where time has no meaning, suffering ends and God's glory is shown.
4. You know, we can learn from Buddhists around taking time to be still and meditate and pray. I'm not sure you and I slow down enough. I also think we can learn to detach ourselves from the stuff of this world ... material things.
5. But, I think Christianity has something more to offer ... hope and peace. If we trust the Good News that comes from trusting Jesus Christ, there will be peace that passes all of our understanding ... and eternal life in God's Paradise!

Next Week: Islam, Five Pillars, An Invitation and A Challenge...

Let's Pray!