

Text: John 3:16

Title: "Christianity: Give Me Six Good Reasons"

Introduction: Well, this is it. We are wrapping up our series "World Religions and the Gospel Truth". Over the past few weeks we have taken a look at the five major religions, according to numbers, in our world today. The religions we have talked about are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

This past week, we spent some serious time talking about our own faith; Christianity. We talked about how we, as Christians, start with God as LOVE. We talked about how sin separates us from our Creator God and how God, throughout history, has worked to mend that relationship with humanity.

Then we talked about Jesus. Jesus was God in a human being. Jesus went through every temptation and experience that we go through and understands us well. We also got a pretty good look at what God is like by seeing how Jesus conducted himself in real life ... like us! He set an example of how to live this life and showed us what God is like. Jesus revealed what love looks like!

In our Scriptures it says that the ultimate act of friendship is to lay down one's life for another. We must be loved! Jesus laid down his life for all of us ... the ultimate sacrifice! Because of that sacrifice, all you and I have to do is accept the gift of forgiveness. WAIT! DID YOU HEAR THAT?

I want you to imagine what it will be like when your life ends. I want you to imagine what it would be like to stop breathing here and then be fully aware that your eternity has started. Where are you? Can you imagine what it would be like ... "Oh my gosh! All that stuff in church was true! Why didn't I accept that gift?!?" Forever is a long time!

Or, the other way ... Imagine what it would be like to start eternity realizing that you were in God's Paradise ... FOREVER! You did it! You don't ever have to worry again! Pure joy ... pure happiness ... a feeling of being loved beyond our comprehension.

Last week I challenged you all to do some *slow cooking* on what it means to be a Christian / a Follower of Christ. I hope that you have done that. I hope that you have let it sink in how much God loves you and how much God wants to be close to you and how much God wants to show off His Kingdom to you forever.

Well, let's start this week with this ... I grew up in a Christian family; not perfect, just Christian. My Dad was a United Methodist Pastor and I watched him pastor in three different settings ... rural southwest Wisconsin, central Wisconsin paper mill town and then in the Fox Cities in what started out to be a land-locked downtown city church. I watched how hard he worked and saw him go through the joys and difficulties that come with being a pastor.

After a lot of fighting with God, I chose to do the same thing. I went through four years of college, four years of graduate school and a whole lot of writing and interviews with the United Methodist Church to be a pastor. Sarah and I spent a lot of money to get that schooling and credentialing and we will be paying for it for years to come. Why?!

Why would I go through that? Why would I work 7 days a week? Why go out in the middle of the night to be at the bedside of someone hurting? Why counsel people who

are going through life crises? Why sacrifice my family and my kids again and again because of the ministry? Why?

Because I believe that God transforms lives presently and eternally! I believe that through His Son Jesus Christ you and I have a chance at joy and happiness here on this earth that is indescribable. I believe that when we leave this earth we will find out truly for the first time how earth-shattering was Jesus act of love on the cross!

Why do I believe that? I'm going to give 6 reasons today why I am a Christian. My hope is that this will help all of us to be able to say out loud / articulate what we believe and why. I believe that there are people all around us who will ask us someday, "Why didn't you tell me about Jesus?" My hope is that number will go down as our boldness goes up!

At this time I invite you to take the insert out of your program. There is one in there that has an outline for today on one side (announcements on the other) with our Scripture for today at the top. I encourage you to follow along and fill in the blanks and write down whatever notes you think will be helpful for you. Again, my hope is that each of us will walk out of here today either encouraged to explore a faith in Jesus Christ, encouraged to share our faith in Jesus Christ and/or feel like we have more words to use when the time is right to share with someone we know what we believe.

Let's start with our Scripture for today. It is John 3:16 and you will find it on that insert and also on our screens up front. Let's read together, please:

READ JOHN 3:16 NOW AND PRAY!

Why do we Christians believe what we believe? Let me give my top 6 reasons and see if they help us all out...

- I. The Accounts of the Eyewitnesses
 - A. There is historical backing to what we believe in Jesus. It's not just Scripture but you can go to other historical writings and read about what was going on in Galilee and Jerusalem as Jesus lived and ministered there.
 - B. The Disciples of Jesus lived with Him for three years.
 1. They heard Jesus' teachings, saw the people healed by Jesus hand and experienced the consistency of Jesus' love.
 2. They were there when He was arrested.
 3. They watched Jesus die on a cross.
 4. They witnessed His resurrected body.
 5. The Disciples/Apostles passed on what all they saw and heard orally ... and later they wrote it down.
 - C. Though Luke was not an eyewitness, he spent time with many who were, so when he wrote he made sure he had the facts.
 1. He wrote clearly of the people who were with Jesus during his ministry as well as after his resurrection.
 2. Luke wrote clearly in the Book of Acts the transformation that happened in people's lives as they gave their lives over to Jesus.

- D. Paul was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry either, but he had an experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus that caused him to change completely.
 - 1. Paul is historically recorded as one who persecuted the Christian movement as blasphemy against the Jewish faith.
 - 2. Then, later, Paul is recorded as being the single greatest promoter of Jesus Christ to the world in the 1st Century.
- E. The testimony of each of these witnesses is, to me, credible. The thing that clinches it for me is how those witnesses' lives were completely transformed by committing themselves to Jesus as Lord.

II. The Christian Ethic

- A. The second reason that I am a Christian is that I believe Christianity offers the most complete and real way for a human to live.
 - 1. When we follow Jesus, we are challenged to love our neighbors and our enemies.
 - 2. Following Jesus challenges us to sacrifice some part of ourselves for the betterment of other people.
 - 3. Living for Jesus calls us to live a life filled with love.
- B. Over the past 2,000 years, many of the great movements that made a difference socially came from followers of Jesus.
 - 1. Civil rights movement here in the U.S.
 - 2. Movements to end slavery around the world are still being led by Christians.
- C. Christians started the majority of the hospitals and universities / colleges in the U.S. Also, Christians are at the heart of the majority of movements to improve our society (inner city, etc.); especially with the poor and broken.
- D. These things have happened because of the impact Jesus Christ has had on people's lives. In turn, they desire to do good for the people around them as God's Word teaches.
- E. This is part of the reason I am a Christian.

III. The Picture of God Through Jesus

- A. As we have studied the religions of this world, the picture of God that I get through Jesus Christ is way more intriguing, encouraging, motivational and compelling than any other view of God.
 - 1. Jesus looked at the people and knew they needed a shepherd. I like that.
 - 2. I like what I see of God through Jesus when he scolds the religious leaders as hypocrites.
 - 3. I like what I see of God through Jesus when I read about His forgiveness of a woman caught in adultery.
 - 4. I like what I see of God through Jesus when he spend numerous hours teaching about the Kingdom of God to

people who probably had no idea that they were missing anything.

5. When Jesus calms the storms and the disciples are amazed ... I like that picture of God.
 6. As Jesus healed numerous people and they figured out that Jesus was the Messiah ... I like that.
 7. When Jesus talks to a woman at a well that has been divorced 5 times and offers her living water and then makes her an evangelist to her town in Samaria ... that's my kind of God.
 8. When we see Jesus washing his disciples dirty, grimy feet; hanging on a cross and dying in my place and your place; when Jesus comes up from the grave and lives again to defeat death and evil ... That is a picture of God that gets me revved up!
- B. I am a Christian because I connect with Jesus. Something about how Jesus lived for God burns inside of me in a way I cannot fully describe. I want to be like Jesus!

IV. A Transforming Power of the Cross

- A. I am a Christian because of the power given us through Christ.
1. Jesus offers us forgiveness—A clean relationship with God at the expense of God's Son Jesus suffering and dying.
 2. When people really realize what that means ... it changes them. They become new people.
- B. I would not be who I am today if God had not made what happened on the cross somewhat clear to me.
1. God has changed me from the inside out (still doing it) as I have experienced first-hand that unconditional love that Jesus showed.
 2. I don't look at the world around me the same way anymore ... I have been changed by the power of the Cross!
 3. What is life really about ... well, Jesus did not die for nothing—not on my watch!

V. Life After Death

- A. I am a Christian because of the hope we have because Jesus proved himself trustworthy when he came out of the grave on the third day.
1. Jesus promised that death could not hold him captive and he proved it.
 2. Jesus promised that he would be back on the third day and he kept his promise.
- B. When I am with people as loved ones are dying or when I face losing a loved one ... when I think about my own life and death; I like being a Christian!

- C. I have performed a whole lot of funerals as a pastor. I'm not sure what I would say if I didn't believe that Jesus showed us that there is life after death ... this life is just the beginning of eternity!
- D. What would I say to families that have lost loved ones at way too young of an age if I couldn't offer them hope? If I can't say to them, "There is a way that you can have hope to see them again ... you can live for Jesus Christ while you are still here"; I have nothing to offer.
- E. I believe that if we are true believers and not just "church-goers", we will get together again in a much better place than this!
- F. That's a good reason to be a Christian, right?!?

VI. The Experience of Christ

- A. Finally, this ... I am a Christian because I have experienced what it's like to go from 'lost' to 'found'.
 - 1. I know what it's like to feel lonely and worthless and have that changed to feelings of worth and love.
 - 2. The best moments in my life have all been related to my faith in Jesus Christ.
- B. I have experienced a joy in my life through prayer and praise and serving others in mission as Jesus calls us to do, that nothing else in my life compares to.
 - 1. I have a peace in my life through God that is hard to explain.
 - 2. I am a better person because I am a follower of Jesus.
 - 3. I've seen me without Christ ... I know how God has changed me.
- C. What I have experienced of Jesus Christ causes me to do what I do. I want everybody I know and meet and don't know to get to know the Jesus that I do.
 - 1. I know that Jesus Christ can make anyone's life better here on earth and in the life to come.
 - 2. I don't want anyone to miss what it's like to live for Jesus.
 - 3. That's why I talk about standing at the fence at the back of the Kingdom of God and reach out and grab everyone I can and bring them onto God's property!
- D. Living for Jesus Christ is the best way to live.
 - 1. It gives peace and joy like nothing else.
 - 2. It gives us purpose.
 - 3. God's Spirit will give direction in life. Anyone need direction?
 - 4. People haven't lived until they've lived Jesus' way.

VII. Invitations

- A. I want to finish with two prayers...
 - 1. For those of you who have never given your life to Jesus Christ and feel nudged to do that this morning... let's pray...

- a. Jesus Christ = follow you.
 - b. Help me do this.
 - c. I accept your gift of salvation.
 - d. I will trust you.
 - e. Help me to get to know, love, honor and live for you.
 - f. Forgive my sins ... wash me clean ... make me a new person.
 - g. I commit my life to you.
 - h. Thank you for being my Savior and Lord...
2. For those of you who have prayed this prayer, God heard you and He loves you. This prayer is not the end of your faith journey ... it's the beginning. Attend worship and hang out with people who will help you grow in your faith.
3. The 2nd Prayer is for those of you who are already Christians...
- a. God, thanks again for the salvation you offer me.
 - b. I give all of me and all I have to you.
 - c. Help me to know, love and follow you well.
 - d. Fill me with your Spirit so that I can know you more.
 - e. Give me wisdom as needed.
 - f. Help me to love you with everything I've got!
 - g. Help me to love my neighbors and my enemies like you challenge me to do.
 - h. Lord, help others to see you when they meet me.
 - i. I recommit myself to you again today, Lord.
 - j. Jesus, help me to share you with others by the way I act and the way I talk.
 - k. Thank you for being my Savior and Lord...

Communion!

Next Week: A new series that will help us battle POVERTY!

A special thanks again to Rev. Adam Hamilton for the inspiration and outline for this sermon series. Check out his book, *Christianity and World Religions*.