

# “No Other Name” – The Exclusive Inclusivity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

---

## Introduction

### The Text

- A. The story we’re looking at this morning really began really back in [Acts 3](#) if you recall . . .
1. Peter and John were coming into the temple and they see this man who had been crippled from birth out in front of the gate there in the dirt—helpless and begging. And they healed him in the name of Jesus.
  2. The crowds gather, wondering what in the world just happened, and the gospel is proclaimed.
  3. And then the religious leaders catch wind of the commotion and they run upon them, hoping to make a swift end of it. They arrest Peter and John. And then drag them out the next morning for trial.
  4. And here finally Peter gets a chance to speak. But what is he going to say?
- B. Let’s pick it up and read [Acts 4:8-12](#)—though, as I mentioned last week, we’re going to focus today in particular on that singular and spectacular verse there in [v. 12](#), so keep an eye out for it . . .

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders,<sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,<sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.<sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.<sup>12</sup> *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*” (Acts 4:8–12)

### The Exclusivity of Christianity

- A. The past couple of sermons I’ve led off with somewhat elaborate introductions, but this morning I have nothing of the sort for you.
1. I just want to say straightaway that we shall be concerning ourselves now in particular with what we might call the exclusivity of Christianity.
    - a. It seems to me, you would be hard-pressed to locate a more exclusive truth claim in all the Scriptures (or anywhere else for that matter) than the one we have before us in our text this morning in [Acts 4:12](#).
- B. Now, it comes as no surprise to us here in the secular, pluralistic culture of the Bay Area, that such exclusivity is not very popular out there in the streets. Many find it *offensive* and *objectionable*. Maybe it even comes off that way to you.

1. Whatever the case, we'll address some of these objections as we go along, and I hope that by the time we're done here this morning we'll come to see that this exclusivity that's baked into the Christian faith, it's not only *necessary*, it's *good*.
- C. Regarding Christianity, I want to show you three things in particular: (1) That It Is Exclusive; (2) Why It Is Exclusive; and (3) How It Is Exclusive.

## (1) That It Is Exclusive

### We're Talking about Salvation

- A. Before I can really get going in this, I need to make sure we realize what all this exclusivity is concerning in particular.
1. Twice in our text, at the beginning and end there, it becomes clear that we are talking about what the Bible refers to as "salvation": "[T]here is *salvation* in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12).
- B. So we're talking about salvation. Obviously, this is a very *rich, biblical category*, but it's one I think that immediately finds traction even in our own *personal experience day to day*.
1. What I mean is this: Though we all might initially define salvation a bit differently, we're all *looking for it* in one way or another. We all have this sense that the world is broken; that things aren't working the way that they ought; that something's off out there, and maybe even also in here.
- C. And we're looking for answers. We're looking for rescue. We're looking for *salvation* . . .
1. This is the girl who is in bed with yet another man, hoping still she might just yet find the "one"—the one who will *fill* her, *satisfy* her, *protect* her, *care* for her, *save* her.
  2. This is the guy who, though he's got a perfectly good job, he's always putting his resume out there, dragging a line in the water behind, in case a bigger fish comes along and bites. He can't shake the feeling that he *needs more*, that what he has is *not enough*.
  3. This is what we're all going to hear over and over again in 2024 from those presidential hopefuls: "*We know things in your life are broken and off. We know you're unhappy and in need. And, wouldn't you know it, hallelujah, I'm here to fix it. My policies will put everything right in the universe. I will wipe away every tear from your eye. Sickness and death shall be no more. Unicorns shall once again roam the land spreading magic and delight to every American. I'll save you . . . vote for me.*"
    - a. Why do these same grandiose and empty promises capture us year after year? Why are we so perennially vulnerable to this false advertising?

- i. Well, it's because we're all looking for something or someone to save us. We're desperate for it. We know we need it. We just aren't exactly sure *where to look*.
- D. And then along comes Peter, and he says: *"I do. I don't just have a mere suggestion here (fingers crossed). Nor do I have one possible solution among many. I have the answer . . . the only answer. And his name is Jesus."*

## The Exclusive Claims of Christianity

- A. So, now that it's clear we're talking about salvation here, let me make sure it's abundantly plain to us that Christianity makes exclusive claims regarding it . . .

### In Our Text

- A. In our text it's quite simple to see. In our English translation, salvation is mentioned at the *beginning* and *end*, and there are four little bits crammed into the *middle* that all serve to put an unmistakable emphasis on the exclusivity of Jesus in this.

1. First Peter gives us two negative little bits: there is *"no one else"* and *"no other name"*.
  - a. As John Stott comments here: *"[These] two negatives . . . proclaim the positive uniqueness of the name of Jesus"* (BST).
2. But then Peter, with the next two little bits, speaks to the scope in it all: There is *"no one else"* and *"no other name"* *"under heaven"* *"given among men"*.
  - a. These two additions make clear the sweeping and universal scope of the claim here:
    - i. *"[U]nder heaven"* covers all *geography*. There's nowhere else to go. Turn over every stone, you won't find another viable option.
    - ii. *"[G]iven among men"* covers all *humanity*. There's no one else who can do it. Even the best of us are in need of being saved ourselves.

(1) *In all the earth, among all people . . . there's only one who can save. So this is an unmistakably exclusive claim.*

### In All of Scripture

- B. And, though perhaps it's put most pointedly for us here in [Acts 4:12](#), this certainly is not the only place in the Bible where we see such a thing being said. It's all over really . . .
  1. So, for example, Jesus himself would say to Thomas near the end of his time on earth, [John 14:6](#): *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
    - a. Contrary to popular opinion, there aren't many ways to God. There aren't many *paths up the mountain*, and we all just happen to be on the Christian path.

- b. Oh no. Out of Jesus' own mouth we hear it: he's the only way—he's the way, and the *truth*, and the *life*. And you don't have any of that if you don't have him. That's quite a claim. And it's offended many through the millennia.
- 2. Peter, in [Acts 4](#) is preaching to the *Jews* in particular here. But later in the book of Acts, Paul will say virtually the same thing, this time to *Gentiles*—people who had placed their faith in many of the other pagan gods for salvation and deliverance. Here's what he says, [Acts 17:30-31](#): “<sup>30</sup>The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,<sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”
  - a. Jesus is not just Savior *for the Jews*, he's it for *everyone everywhere*. And it's time to wise up, and get right!
- 3. I love how clear Paul makes it for us in [Gal. 1:6-8](#): “<sup>6</sup>I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”
  - a. I don't care if a glowing angel comes and tells you he's found another way to get saved, you go ahead and *curse* him to his face. Why? Because there's only *one way*. There's only *one gospel*. There's only *one Savior*.

## Raising Objections

- A. Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, when we talk like this nowadays, especially in a place like the Bay Area, most people find it incredibly offensive. They *object* to the exclusivity of these claims.
  - 1. “*We are now in a pluralistic society. The world's not as small as it once was. We live next to Hindus, and Buddhists, and Muslims, and secular atheist/agnostic folks. You can't talk like this. It's narrow. It's arrogant. It's intolerant. It's divisive.*”
    - a. “*I mean for goodness sake, isn't it because of exclusive religious claims like this that our news this past week has been saturated with all the horrors that are taking place in Israel and the Gaza Strip? There you have the Jews and the Muslims, with their exclusive religious claims, and they're killing each other over it. That's where this goes. That's why we can't have it.*”
- B. And, of course, there is some truth to this. So we can sympathize with the objection. Exclusive religious claims do often make people *arrogant, at best*, and *oppressive, at worst*.
  - 1. They think they have the truth and that they're saved by acting on the basis of that truth.
  - 2. And, in time, they start to feel superior to others who don't have it or do it.
  - 3. And they may even feel justified in *villainizing* them, *hating* them, *hurting* them.
    - a. So we don't have to act like that's not a real thing. It is.

- C. But is the answer to just *do away* with religion—or at least *defang* or *neutralize* it by relativizing it and saying such disingenuous things like: “*All religions are basically true*”; or “*We can’t really know anything for certain about God, so just live and let live*”?
1. That’s what we’re told these days, right? “*You can have your religion—your own personal thing, in private—but don’t push that on us out here in the public square, because it’s just offensive and divisive.*”
    - a. Well, this line of thinking, though perhaps it arises from a good desire—to see people treating one another *charitably* and with *humility*—it doesn’t hold.
      - i. In their attempt to be *inclusive*, they end up being just as *exclusive*, often even more so in the end.
- D. It breaks down both *logically* and *socially* . . .
1. Logically, what we understand is that we really can’t avoid making exclusive truth claims, no matter what we do.
    - a. Even when you say that *no one should make exclusive religious truth claims*, you are making an exclusive religious truth claim. You are saying that Christians (among others) are *wrong* in what they claim and that your way of thinking about religion is *right*.
      - i. You may look like you are being *inclusive*, but you’re just as *exclusive* as the rest of us. It’s unavoidable.
  2. But we see this at work in the social dimension as well. Ironically, those who cry out for *tolerance* and all this can often be some of the most *intolerant* people around. Have you noticed this?
    - a. For example, there are those who say we should be wholly *tolerant* and *accepting* and *affirming* of the LGBTQ+ lifestyle in all its facets, even in church and things. Who are we to judge and tell them what is right or wrong?
      - i. But when we Christians disagree—when we say that’s not what we think the Bible teaches—are they *tolerant* and *accepting* and *affirming* of our views?
        - (1) No of course not. They get *angry* and even *aggressive* at times. They look down on us as *bigots* and *oppressors*. So they oppress us. They’ll include us so long as we agree with them. And, if we don’t, we get excluded.
- E. So don’t you see? At the end of the day, this call to do away with exclusive religious truth claims for the betterment of a pluralistic society isn’t really being honest about what’s actually happening.
1. They’re *not doing away* with exclusive religious truth claims.

2. They're just *trying to replace* our exclusive religious truth claims with theirs.
    - a. And this leads to *just as many problems*, if not *more*.
- F. So we can't escape it. Clearly the answer, then, is not to just *get rid of* such exclusive truth claims, because we can't actually do so.
1. But then what is the answer? Well, I hope to *circle back* to that a bit later . . .

## (2) Why It Is Exclusive

### Two Reasons

- A. I've shown you that Christianity is exclusive, let me now show you why it is so. (And this starts to hint towards what makes Christianity's exclusive truth claims so different from the others, and why it might actually be *salt and light* in our culture instead of *divisive and oppressive*.)
1. What sets Christianity apart? What makes it unique from all other religions or worldviews? Why would we dare say Jesus is the only way of salvation?
- B. Well, I suppose there are a number of reasons we could put forward at this point. I'll highlight just two: (1) Jesus Heals Our Wound More Deeply; and (2) Jesus Gives of His Salvation More Freely. The two really dovetail together, but let's consider them one at a time here . . .

### Reason #1: Jesus Heals Our Wound More Deeply

- A. Of the first, I want you to realize that, though we're all haunted by the effects of the fall and sense that need for salvation as I've said, every other religion or worldview *severely underestimates the depth of the problem*.
1. And, therefore, they all also *fall terribly short of any real and lasting solution*.
- B. Every other approach says we just need to tinker a bit on the surface of things, but *we can do it*.
1. So some would call us to modify our behavior.
  2. Others would call us to change our way of thinking.
  3. Still others with a more base perspective might say you just need an additive—get yourself a *girl* or a *pill* or whatever and you'll feel better.
    - a. But all would say: we can fix this.
    - b. So all, therefore, as the prophet Jeremiah would say, heal our wound "*lightly*" (cf. [Jer. 6:14; 8:11](#)).
- C. I was reading in Mark's gospel for my devotions and there's this conversation Jesus is having there with the Pharisees and scribes as he is prone to do.

1. And they're all bent up because Jesus' disciples aren't doing all the ritual washings and things that they prescribe. They're unclean before God and they need *to clean up* is the idea.
  2. But Jesus says in response: “<sup>14</sup> Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him. . . . <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:14-15, 21-22).
    - a. Do you hear what he's saying? “*You think you just need a bath or something—just tinker with the surface, and all will be good. Listen, the problem isn't merely with how you act or how you think, or what you do or don't have . . . it's who you are, it's deeper in, it's in your hearts.*”
      - i. Therefore, you don't just need a little *behavior modification*, or some *higher education*, or an *additive* of some sort . . . you need a *resurrection*. You need to be made new from the inside out!
- D. This is what Oswald Chambers is getting at when he writes: “Sin is a fundamental relationship; it is not wrong doing, it is wrong *being*, deliberate and emphatic independence of God. . . . Other religions deal with *sins*; [the Christian religion] alone deals with *sin*. . . . The revelation of the Bible is not that Jesus Christ took upon Himself our fleshly sins, but that He took upon Himself the heredity of sin which no man can touch. . . . He deliberately took upon His own shoulders, and bore in His own Person, the whole massed sin of the human race—'He hath *made Him to be sin for us*, who knew no sin,' and by so doing He . . . rehabilitated the human race; He put it back to where God designed it to be, and anyone can enter into union with God on the ground of what Our Lord has done on the Cross” (*Utmost*, October 7).
1. Do you understand what's being said here? Many other religions can help you *tinker* and clean up a bit on the surface of things (they can “*deal with sins*”).
  2. But none of them can *change you fundamentally*—clean you up and put you back together on the inside (they can't “*deal with sin*”—the deeper problem of a sin nature).
    - a. Only Jesus can. Because only Jesus, though one with God, *plunged into the depths* of our broken humanity, *suffered its due* on that rugged cross, and then *lifted it up* and out of that place of darkness to the light of a new day in his resurrection.
- E. This is what Peter is referring to in [Acts 4:11](#) when he rebukes those religious leaders, saying: “*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.*”
1. He was “*rejected*”, he was despised.
    - a. This made me think immediately of [Isa. 53:3](#): “*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*”

- b. But why was he rejected? Why was he despised? Well, the prophet goes on: “<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne *our griefs* and carried *our sorrows*; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for *our transgressions*; he was crushed for *our iniquities*; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (vv. 4–5).
  - i. And, of course, this isn’t just physical healing that’s in view here. We’re healed at the deepest level. Our hearts have been changed. In our sin, we once were *far from God*; but now in Jesus, we’ve been *brought near*.
- 2. That stone which the builders rejected, “has become the cornerstone” of God’s new work in redemption.
  - a. Indeed, ironically, it was *because he was rejected* that he could *become the cornerstone*, that he could be the start of something new for us.
    - i. He was *torn down under the wrath of God* so that we could be *built up in the grace of God*.

## Reason #2: Jesus Gives of His Salvation More Freely

- A. And this, then, leads us to that second piece I mentioned, where now we recognize that, amazingly, the gospel not only brings healing to us at a *deeper level*, it’s also offered to us *free of charge*, by grace through faith.
  - 1. And this too sets Jesus’ salvation apart from all the other offerings on the table.
- B. I love how author Philip Yancey recounts an old story from the life C.S. Lewis: “During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world were discussing whether any one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. ‘What’s the rumpus about?’ he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. In his forthright manner Lewis responded, ‘Oh, that’s easy. It’s *grace*.’  
 After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eightfold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant [i.e. keeping the commandments], and the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God’s love unconditional.”
- C. What sets Christianity apart from all the others? You’re saved by “*grace*”, not by works. But let’s be clear . . .
  - 1. This salvation may be offered “*free of charge*” to us, but Jesus paid for it with his blood.
  - 2. God’s love is made “*unconditional*” for us, but that’s only because Jesus fulfilled all the conditions, both *positive* and *negative*, on our behalf.

- a. He lived the life we should have lived (*positive* conditions).
  - b. And died the death we should have died (*negative* conditions).
  - c. And when he *rises* again from the dead and pours out his *Spirit* upon us, by virtue of our union with him all that is rightly his is now truly ours as well. Not because we've *earned* it, but because he has, and he's offered it to us *freely by grace*.
- D. Don't you see? All the other religions and worldviews attempt to give you good advice—here are some things you can do to try to make your way towards *God*, or *heaven*, or *enlightenment*, or *paradise*, or *salvation*.
- 1. But only Christianity gives you good news, the *gospel of grace*, the *declaration of all that Jesus has already accomplished* for you, even when you were his enemy! Jesus is not merely a *good teacher*, he is the *Savior* of the world!

## Poignantly Pictured

- A. I suppose that all of this is most poignantly pictured for us in this healing of the man who had been crippled from birth.
- 1. Indeed, Peter seems to be intentionally forging this connection for us when he uses the same Greek word in our text to refer both to this man's *healing* and to our *salvation*. It's the Greek word *sōzō* and it shows up both in [v. 9](#) and in [v. 12](#):
    - a. “[W]e are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been *healed* [Gk. *sōzō* = ‘saved’!] . . .” ([v. 9](#)).
    - b. “And there is *salvation* in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be *saved* [Gk. *sōzō*]” ([v. 12](#)).
      - i. The implication I think is clear: this man's *physical healing in Jesus' name* is a portrait or parable, a visible picture, of what our *full salvation is like in Jesus' name*.
- B. So what is it like?
- 1. Well, spiritually, we understand, we're lying in the dirt. We're helpless. And we've been so from birth: “*by nature [we are] children of wrath*,” Paul says in [Eph. 2:3](#).
  - 2. So we can't just clean ourselves up. We can't save ourselves.
    - a. Every other religion and worldview comes and leans over this man crumpled in the dirt and tells him to: “*Rise up and walk. Follow these steps. Read this book. You can do it!*”
    - b. He can't do it. The wound is too deep. It can't be healed by his own *works*. It's got to be by *grace*, by someone coming in from the outside and lifting him up.
- C. You see while every other religion and worldview tells this man to merely *rise up and walk*, only Christianity says that he is to do so, and can do so, *in Jesus' name*: “*I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*” ([Acts 3:6](#)). And that makes all the difference.

1. It's not in this man to do it, but it is in Jesus. He can offer not mere *behavior modification*, or *higher education*, or some sort of *addition* . . . but *resurrection*! And he raises him right there to new life. He's leaping for joy. He runs into the temple. He's right with God. He's healed. He's *saved*.
- D. And so it is for us and the full salvation offered to us in Jesus. *We can't* do it. But *he can*!
1. If I were to keep reading in Eph. 2, here's what we find: “<sup>3</sup> [W]e all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been *saved* . . .” (vv. 3–5).
- E. “[T]here is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Why? Because Jesus *heals our wounds more deeply* and *gives of his salvation more freely*.
1. And this leads to that last point I wanted to discuss . . .

### (3) How It Is Exclusive

#### In the Most Inclusive Way

- A. So we've seen *that* Christianity is exclusive, and we've seen a bit as to *why* it is exclusive, but now as we draw things to a close here, I want to consider *how* it is exclusive.
1. And this really should close the loop I left open earlier regarding the objections so many have in our day to exclusive claims like this.
    - a. Because, you see, Christianity is *exclusive* in the *most inclusive way*.
- B. Here's what I mean. We hear the objection that we shouldn't hold to such exclusive claims because they make you *proud* and *judgmental* and *pushy* and even *oppressive* towards those who don't have your truth and live according to it.
1. But, you see, there's one massive oversight in this line of thinking. And that is: the *type of person you become* in response to such an exclusive claim is specifically connected to the *type of exclusive claim you're holding to*.
    - a. Think about it. If your exclusive religious claim has to do with you saving yourself by your works or your intellect or whatever (as all other attempts do in one way or another)—well then of course you're going to have that sort of dynamic where you *do it, you figured it out*, and so you're *better* than the others.
    - b. But if your exclusive claim centers in on the one who was *rejected for you, suffered the judgment you deserve* in your place, and *saved you* when you couldn't even get

off the ground, by *grace alone*—well then that makes a different kind of person altogether.

- i. If you really take the gospel into your heart, if you've really been changed by it, how could you then look down your nose at anybody? You couldn't.

(1) *"I'm no different. I'm no better. I didn't get in because of my pedigree, my ethnicity, my performance, my intelligence, none of it. If anything all those things were marks against me. No I got in by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That's it!"*

- C. Imagine if this lame man, after being healed in the name of Jesus, soon after is seen standing over another cripple, *mocking him, jeering at him*: *"What's your problem, you lazy piece of filth, pick yourself up. I did it, why can't you? Bum."*
  1. It sounds crazy, but so many Christians (myself included), in our flesh, fall prey to this sort of thing—we *forget, we lose sight*.
  2. If he really understood what happened to him there outside the temple gates, there's *no way he could turn and treat another in this manner*.
- D. Just read the book of Acts. Their conviction about the cross doesn't make them *oppressors*, it makes them *servants*.
  1. Are they willing to be bold, are they willing to bring the truth? Absolutely.
  2. But are they walking with an air of superiority, are they converting by compulsion, are they *oppressing and persecuting* those outside their groups? Not even close.
    - a. It's the opposite. They are loving the outsider, even at threat of their own hurt.
- E. Such a thing is actually hidden in plain sight right here in our text. Did you notice it?
  1. Again, Peter says: "[T]here is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
    - a. Let me ask you: who is the "*we*" here? Peter puts himself *right there alongside* these religious leaders, these "*villains*" who had rejected Jesus and called for his death. Peter makes *no distinction* between him and them. *"We, brothers, can all be saved through Jesus. I'm no different, no better than you. Come and call upon the name of Jesus with me today!"*
      - i. So again, Christians are *exclusive*, but in the *most inclusive way!*
- F. Let me read you something from Tim Keller that brings all this together here and I'll start to draw things to a close.
  1. He's actually reflecting on that book I referenced a few weeks back by Rodney Stark entitled *The Rise of Christianity*. And Keller writes the following: "*One of the paradoxes of history is*

the relationship between the beliefs and the practices of the early Christians as compared to those of the culture around them.

The Greco-Roman world's religious views were open and seemingly tolerant—everyone had his or her own God. The practices of the culture were quite brutal, however. The Greco-Roman world was highly stratified economically, with a huge distance between the rich and poor. By contrast, Christians insisted that there was only one true God, the dying Savior Jesus Christ. Their lives and practices were, however, remarkably welcoming to those that the culture marginalized. The early Christians mixed people from different races and classes in ways that seemed scandalous to those around them. The Greco-Roman world tended to despise the poor, but Christians gave generously not only to their own poor but to those of other faiths. In broader society, women had very low status, being subjected to high levels of female infanticide, forced marriages, and lack of economic equality. Christianity afforded women much greater security and equality than had previously existed in the ancient classical world. During the terrible urban plagues of the first two centuries, Christians cared for all the sick and dying in the city, often at the cost of their lives.

Why would such an exclusive belief system lead to behavior that was so open to others? It was because Christians had within their belief system the strongest possible resource for practicing sacrificial service, generosity, and peace-making. At the very heart of their view of reality was a man who died for his enemies, praying for their forgiveness. Reflection on this could only lead to a radically different way of dealing with those who were different from them. It meant they could not act in violence and oppression toward their opponents” (*The Reason for God*, 20-21).

- G. Now, let me just say in passing: is it true that people throughout history have used Jesus’ name to commit all manner of atrocities? Sadly, yes. It’s still happening today.
1. But please know: you can *stamp his name* on things that have *nothing of his heart or Spirit*. Don’t be fooled or thrown off by that. Just because his name *can and has been abused* doesn’t mean it must be *discarded*. It just means you need to be *discerning*.
- H. My prayer for us this morning is twofold:
1. First, for those of us who are outside of Christianity either because we *object* at the exclusivity of it or because we feel like we’re *not good enough* to be included in it . . .
    - a. I pray you see just how inclusive the exclusive claims of Jesus are, and I pray you’d *come in* and receive of his grace.
  2. Second, for those of us who are in already but are tempted to use it to *prop up our own egos* and make ourselves feel *better than others* . . .
    - a. I pray you would see, again, just how inclusive the exclusive claims of Jesus are, and I pray you’d *go out* and extend his grace to others.
- I. “[T]here is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).