

## *Is Jesus That Exclusive? He Is!*

A sermon by Rev. David Johnson

About 4 weeks ago, the ELCA began their 2019 General Assembly in Milwaukee, WI around the theme, *We Are Church* (notice the lack of the definite article *the*). Throughout that week of pseudo-religious discussion, and convoluted theological jargon, they doubled-down on their commitment to all things socially leftist...all under the guise of love and inclusion, of course.

But the real capper for me, happened on Thursday afternoon, when they presented (*and passed overwhelmingly*) *A Declaration of Inter-religious Commitment*. This was an update based on a previously passed policy statement (1991) dealing with their commitment and support of inter-denominational and inter-faith Ecumenism. It was a laughable process where any dissent was quickly squelched (*an amendment declaring Jesus' words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" was overwhelmingly defeated*), and the outcome clearly assumed (*the yes's tallied 97.48%, with only 23 delegates voting no*).

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm fully supportive of fulfilling God's great commissions to reach the lost, love our enemies, serve the outcast, and show compassion to our neighbors, regardless of their spiritual status or heritage. And I look for these divine appointments when they come up. After all, the end of each of God's instructions is the underlying command to love God and others as we seek to draw them to Jesus Christ. We are not called to love for love's sake, simply going through some caring motions but leaving our neighbor in the pit of their own lostness. We, who have been reconciled to God, are to be about the business of reconciling others who are lost, and without Christ; as Paul writes in his second letter to Corinth:

**2 Corinthians 5:18-21** Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

But to do this, we have to be clear about who this Jesus is that we're proclaiming. Is He simply an impressive religious leader? How about an extraordinary preacher and teacher of insightful spiritual truths? Is He the compassionate and kind servant of the down-cast, the post-child whose principles of *love-for-all* guide our social justice convictions and programs? Or maybe He's the turn-over of tables, the one who commends my raised fist and gives license to my screams of injustice.

The short, and Biblical answer to each of these answers would be a resounding, NO! Oh, they may each carry a fraction of accuracy in defining Jesus. But in

themselves, they are wholly inadequate. For in the end, the names that suit Jesus Christ best are "Faithful and True," "The Word of God," and "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

**Revelation 19:11-16** And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God...<sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Now does that sound like a God who is interested in sharing His platform with idols, or incorporating anyone else (even religious leaders) in the control or management of the universe? Are we to gather from this, or from other Scriptures, that the God-head is open and tolerant of usurpers and even well-meaning under-shepherds? No!

**Exodus 20:3-6** "You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, <sup>6</sup> but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

**Isaiah 42:8** "I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

**Isaiah 48:11** "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.

And oh yeah, how about this little gem:

**John 14:6-7** Jesus \*said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. <sup>7</sup> If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

Remember, the one thing that the Christian Church has that no other faith-group can claim is a living leader who has defeated all possible enemies, including death. Oh, many can point to insightful contemplatives, persuasive orators, or even dynamic leaders. Some of these examples may have even been kind, good, and self-sacrificing. But sadly, they are all, or soon will be, DEAD. They lived out their lives, effecting a limited number of people, and went to their graves to decay. But Jesus Christ, our risen Savior, made multiple promises sealed by the fact that He rose from the dead!

A little more than a decade ago, a Scripps Howard/Ohio University poll found that most Americans don't believe they will experience a bodily resurrection after they die. Only 36 percent of the 1,007 adults interviewed responded positively to the question: "*Do you believe that, after you die, your physical body will be resurrected*

someday?" Fifty-four percent said they don't believe so, and 10 percent were undecided.

In response, Al Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary observed, "*I continually am confronted by Christians, even active members of major churches, who have never heard this taught in their local congregations. We have a lowest-common-denominator Christianity being taught in so many denominations that has produced a people who simply do not know some of the most basic Christian truths.*"

Quite literally, we're no different from those to whom Paul wrote in Corinth, but without their excuse.

**1 Cor 1:22 ...indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

However, the failure of the world to acknowledge the truth of Jesus' resurrection and the promise of Easter, in no way detracts from its validity. What evidence do we have to validate the truth of Jesus' resurrection?

- Stories of near-death experiences?
- Paranormal phenomenon?
- Religious stories, fables, myth?
- Internal evidence and longings?

None of these can truly answer the questions concerning Jesus' resurrection, nor our own. They are subjective, emotional, vastly circumstantial, and anecdotal. The list above is more about wishful thinking than actual proof. But that doesn't mean there is no support for Jesus' physical resurrection.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-9 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; <sup>7</sup> then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; <sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.**

We have concrete support for our convictions concerning Jesus ministry, death, and resurrection:

- Biblical authority
- Eye-witness testimonies
- Historical accounts and evidences
- Martyrdom of the early believers
- Writings of early church fathers

But even with all of the hard documentation, what difference does Jesus' Resurrection make?

1. It validates Jesus' claims to deity.
  - a. Jesus Himself claimed to be God (Jn. 8:58; 10:30)
  - b. The NT eyewitnesses clearly identified Jesus as God (Mt.16:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jn. 5:18; Mk. 14:61-62).
  - c. Early church fathers identified Jesus as God
2. Proves a general resurrection is real. 1 Cor. 15:12-13
3. Not raised? Faith and preaching are vain. 1 Cor. 15:14
4. Not raised? We're false witnesses / liars. 1 Cor. 15:15
5. Not raised? Faith is void and we live in sin. 1 Cor. 15:17
6. Not raised? Dead believers are destroyed. 1 Cor. 15:18
7. Not raised? We are pitiful / pathetic. 1 Cor. 15:19
8. Not raised? Death wins, God fails, Satan wins. 1 Cor. 15:25-28
9. Not raised? No purpose to life! 1 Cor. 15:32

Oh, the impact of that one event of Jesus' life...the spiritual ripples that come from a singular act. The theological consequences are dizzying. But what difference does Jesus' resurrection make to you personally? What impact does His bodily resurrection have on your life?

1. *Proof*: The fact of Jesus' resurrection verifies our Faith.
2. *Peace*: The fact that Jesus has defeated the greatest of adversaries, sin and death, should flood us with peace.
3. *Power*: The same power that raised Christ from the dead now empowers us.
4. *Perspective*: Earth's rewards are momentary/ the rewards of following Christ are eternal.
5. *Promise*: We can expect a personal resurrection, and have comfort in times of loss.
6. *Pledge*: Jesus' resurrection guarantees His promise of eternal inheritance which He is preparing in heaven for us.
7. *Perfection*: Jesus' resurrection is surety of a future perfected creation and the cessation of all death, pain, sadness.

Many may claim equality, and others will promote their own principles or agendas. But there are no substitutes, no also-rans on the road to eternity. There is only one way to the Father, and that is by faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.