

Session 5

December 29, 2019

AREN'T ALL RELIGIONS THE SAME?

Isaiah 44:6-11; John 14:5-7

Universalism and *religious pluralism* are related terms. Both belief systems are popular; and both are heretical. Essentially, universalism is the belief that everyone ultimately will make it to heaven anyway, so religion doesn't really matter. Religious pluralism is the idea that all religions are basically the same, and that each religion is inherently useful for those who live according to it. It's the age-old argument that "all paths lead up the same mountain." Unfortunately, you can be sincerely committed to your religion, and still be sincerely wrong! Christians who declare their religion to be the only true worship of the only true God risk being called narrow, or judgmental, or arrogant. But that's exactly what the Bible teaches.

Declaration from the One True God (Is. 44:6-8). In this section, God renews His condemnation of idolatry, that costly and continual infidelity that plagued God's chosen people. His declaration begins with His titles (who He alone is) and ends with His deeds (what He alone has done). The word LORD, used twice in verse 6, is the term *Yahweh*, the covenant-keeping, personal name for God most usually applied to the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus. But God is also called the King of Israel, the supreme and sovereign leader of God's people. Third, He is Israel's Redeemer, the One who buys His people back from the bondage they so often placed themselves in. Fourth, He is the Lord of Hosts, the captain of God's armies, both of the earthly realm and the heavenly. Finally, He identifies Himself as the eternal One, "the first" and "the last" (see also Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). The titles themselves demonstrate the authority behind the declaration that follows: "There is no God but Me" (v. 6). The fact that there is no other god like Him is further indicated by the challenge He issues: who, besides the One True God, can announce the future? While the Hebrew construction is a bit difficult, the idea is not simply His ability to *predict* the future, but rather to *proclaim it* as settled fact (see also Is. 41:22 and 43:9), and to do so with 100% accuracy (see Deut. 18:20). This should not be a surprise to God's people because they themselves were witnesses to His sovereign and steadfast power (v. 8). The final phrase is a reminder of His omniscience. The One True God knows all; if there were any other gods, wouldn't He know it?

Condemnation by the One True God (Is. 44:9-11). In contrast to the One True God and those who worship Him (see John 4:23, 24) are those made-up gods and those who follow after them. The whole situation is flawed: false gods are carved by false prophets and worshipped by fools. The original language uses the word *chaotic*. In the end, the entire system of false religion will be exposed and those who follow after it will be "put to shame;" that is, startled, confused, and betrayed by the false claims of false prophets speaking on behalf of false gods (see Rev. 18).

Mediation with the One True God (John 14:5-7). When we fast-forward to the New Testament, Jesus makes His own declarations regarding who He is and what He has done. In response to Thomas' question in verse 5, Jesus announces His own titles in verse 6. Each word is distinctly chosen. Jesus said "I am." The use of the personal pronoun not only recalls the "I AM" of the Old Testament but emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ. The use of the definite article "the" each time does the same thing. He is the *one and only*. He doesn't simply indicate the way

(as Thomas had asked); He *is* the way. He doesn't simply proclaim the truth; He *embodies* the truth. He doesn't simply demonstrate life, He *gives* life. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life enables Him to mediate between holy God and wholly fallen man in a way no law, or work, or animal sacrifice ever could. So exact and so perfect is His position, that no one comes to God apart from Him. Why is all this possible? Because Jesus Christ *is* God. The truth introduced to Thomas here, bears its fruit in Thomas' profession of faith in John 20:28, when seeing the risen Savior, Thomas proclaimed, "My *Lord* and my *God!*"