

Is Jesus the Only Way to God?

Is Jesus the Only Way to God?

Born in India, Ravi Zacharias was immersed in a religious culture offering many gods, and many paths to God. As a teenager, Ravi struggled with the confusion of which religion, if any, is really true.

One day while cycling past a cremation site, Ravi began wondering about an afterlife, and whether there is any existence beyond our ashes. He stopped to ask the priest at the site “where that person, whose body was nothing more than a pile of ashes, was now.” The priest answered, “That is a question you will be asking all your life, and you will never find a certain answer”.[1]

The priest’s uncertainty troubled Ravi. If the priest was without answers himself, how could Ravi ever know truth, and the meaning of life? Without ultimate truth, and hope for the future, life seemed utterly meaningless to him.

At age seventeen Ravi reached a point of desperation, and attempted to take his own life. But amazingly he survived, awakening in a hospital bed where someone shared with him the claims of Jesus Christ. One of those claims contradicted everything Ravi had been taught: Jesus’ claim that he is the only way to God.

Ravi was familiar with eastern religions that offer no absolute truth, or authoritative word of God. Furthermore, no leader of these religions ever made a claim to deity. But Christianity is radically different. Paul Little explains,

“If Jesus Christ is who He claims to be, then we have the authoritative word of God Himself on the subject. If He is God, and there is no other Savior, then obviously He is the only way to God. Christians could not change this fact by a vote, or by anything else.”[2]

The Great Debate

Ravi began to read about Jesus Christ, a man who was different from all others. Before we continue with Ravi’s story, let’s briefly look at Jesus Christ, and the background behind his claims.

For the first thirty years Jesus lived in relative obscurity as a carpenter. Then at age thirty, Jesus began walking the rocky slopes around the Sea of Galilee, teaching, performing miracles, and declaring himself as Savior and Lord. Eyewitnesses confirm that Jesus lived a righteous life. He healed the deaf, the blind, and the lame. He calmed storms, and restored the dead to life. He spoke about God with unflinching authority. Yet Jesus never had a political agenda, or desired personal power. On the contrary, he reached out to the poor, the undesirable and unloved.

In spite of Jesus’ loving words and compassionate deeds, the claims he made about himself infuriated the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus claimed he came from God, and that the only path to God was through him. His radical claims so incensed the religious leaders that they ultimately led to his execution.[3]

The debate about Jesus Christ’s claims didn’t end in the first century after his death on a Roman cross. It continues today. At the center of the debate is the question: Is Jesus Christ really the only way to God?

That debate about whether Jesus is the only way to God became front and center on an Oprah Winfrey TV program during her discussion with several New Age luminaries. During the discussion, Oprah authoritatively asserted “It is wrong to think there is only one way....There are many ways to what you call God.”

When a Christian lady stood up shouting: “Jesus is the only way,” Oprah immediately shot back: “There couldn’t possibly be just one way....Jesus can’t possibly be the only way to God.”[4]

Some Christians accept the Christian message as true because it satisfies their emotional needs. However, C. S

Lewis argues that the Christian message needs to be believed because it is true, not just because it works, or is good.

“Christianity is a statement, which if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”[5]

So, is the Christian claim that Jesus is the only way to God true? In order to find out, we need to answer the following questions:

- Did Jesus claim to be the only way?
- Did the Apostles say he is the only way?
- Do all Religions point to God?
- How do we know Jesus' words are true?

Did Jesus Claim to be the Only Way?

In the final days of Jesus' ministry, he took his twelve disciples into an upper room, where he shared with them that after suffering for sin, he would be leaving to return to his Father in heaven. Jesus assured them he would prepare a place for them in his Father's house, and that they already knew the way there.[6]

But Thomas, more inquisitive and analytical than the other disciples, tried to pin Jesus down. He wanted details: Exactly where was Jesus going, and what path did they need to take to follow him?

Jesus answered Thomas with a statement that must have totally shocked him. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”[7]

Jesus didn't tell Thomas that he needed to follow a particular code of behavior, or list of rules. Jesus was pointing out to Thomas that there is only one way to God, and it is through him [Jesus].

Can you imagine Thomas' reaction? He must have wondered what Jesus meant. How could Jesus himself be the way to God, the truth of God, as well as life itself? All of the disciples must have been baffled at Jesus' strange answer.

Also, Jesus didn't tell Thomas that he [Jesus] is one of many ways, and that there is no ultimate truth. On the contrary, Jesus claimed that he alone is the truth.

Not only did Jesus tell Thomas that he [Jesus] is the life. (Jesus was clearly referring to eternal life.) Jesus was not speaking of eternal life as a mystical place, but a life forever with him. Every other religion referring to heaven or Nirvana is referring to a place, or state of mind. Jesus, on the other hand, was telling his disciples that heaven is an eternal relationship with him and the Father.

Lastly, Jesus told Thomas that the only way to God is through him [Jesus]. If Jesus wanted to make it clear that he is merely one way to God, he would have qualified his statement. But he didn't; Jesus claimed to be the only way.

Did the Apostles Say Jesus is the Only Way?

Jesus spent three years teaching his followers about God, about himself, and about us. These followers later wrote down what Jesus did and said in the New Testament. All Christian beliefs are based upon these writings of the apostles. So did the apostles teach Jesus as the only way to God? We will hear from three of the apostles who wrote extensively about Jesus: Peter, John, and Paul.

Peter: After Jesus had risen from the dead, Peter's words about Jesus are clear.

“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men

by which we must be saved.”[8]

Peter is saying here,

- There is no other path to God than Jesus
- No other person has the authority to save us

John: John also wrote about Jesus as the only way to have eternal life.

“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life, but whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”[9]

John says here,

- God is the one who grants eternal life
- God has chosen Jesus as the way to have eternal life
- Those without Jesus don't have eternal life

Paul: Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, writes to the Roman believers, “The payment for sin is death. But God gives us the free gift of life forever in Christ Jesus our Lord.”[10]

Paul tells us here,

- Sin is a barrier between us and God that leads to spiritual death
- Eternal life is a free gift from God through Jesus Christ

These apostles clearly say that Jesus is the only way to God.

Do All Religions Lead To God?

Many believe that one way to God is too limiting, and those who believe that way are intolerant. Like Oprah, they think it is more understanding and loving to believe in many ways. This idea that all religions lead to God is at the core of New-Age belief. The nineteenth-century teacher, Shri Ramakrishna said,

“God has made different religions....Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole hearted devotion....A truly religious man should think that other religions are also so many paths leading to the Truth.”[11]

But if Jesus is the only way to God, then there can't logically be other ways as well. Ramakrishna's statement can only be right if Jesus is not the only way to God. The same holds true for other religions, which claim they offer the path to God. If they are true, Jesus' words can't equally be true. But if Jesus is speaking truth, other ways to God are not.

And that is what Ravi came to understand in his bed of suicide. After Ravi's failed attempt to take his own life, someone shared with him about a loving God who came to earth to die for him personally. Suddenly, as Ravi heard about Jesus Christ's love for him, hope began stirring in his heart.

Ravi began comparing what Jesus said with what other religions taught. As he read about Jesus, he discovered, “All religions are not the same. All religions do not point to God. At the heart of every religion is an uncompromising commitment to a particular way of defining who God is or is not....Every religion at its core is exclusive.”[12]

Ravi observed that Jesus' teaching about God and life is radically different from that of other religions. Most other

religions teach that the path to God lies in obeying a set of rules, submitting to certain rituals, or practicing a particular lifestyle.[13] None of them can guarantee our eternal destiny, since they teach that it depends upon our performance.

Ravi realized that although many things taught by other religious leaders are good and noble ideas, none of them satisfied his hunger for meaning, or provided hope for life after death. Furthermore, none of them answered Ravi's inner need for forgiveness, love, and comfort during trials.

Jesus, on the other hand, taught that God loves us more than we can imagine.[14] And although as sinners we deserve judgment, Jesus paid the penalty for us himself. His death and resurrection made it possible for us to be forgiven, and to live forever with him in new bodies.[15] Our only part is to put our faith personally in what he did for us.[16] Jesus also tells us to "come unto me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest." [17] Jesus' promise gave Ravi hope.

How Do We Know Jesus' Words Are True?

But how was Ravi to know that Jesus' words are true? Ravi wanted to know if there was any real evidence backing up Jesus' claims. As he examined the New Testament, Ravi came to realize that two objective tests confirm Jesus' claims:

1. Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies written as much as 1500 years before his birth.
2. Jesus defeated death, something no other person, or religious leader had been able to do.

Let's briefly examine these evidences.

Throughout the Old Testament, references to a coming Messiah tell us about a man who would someday bring peace to Israel—and the world. However, this Messiah would first need to die for our sins. Over 700 years before Jesus' birth, Isaiah the prophet reveals that the Messiah will be:[18]

- Despised and rejected
- Pierced for our rebellion
- Crushed for our sins
- Beaten and whipped
- Led like a lamb to the slaughter
- Buried in a rich man's grave
- An offering for sin

Each of these prophecies about the Messiah was fulfilled by Jesus Christ over 700 years later. Isaiah further told us that the Messiah had special credentials.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.....and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." [19]

1. Isaiah 9:6 : Isa. 25:1: 40:9-11: Matt. 28:18: Luke 2:11
2. Isaiah tells us here that the Messiah is God himself—yet in some mysterious way, he will be born as a child. His credentials would be that of God himself.

Altogether, nearly 300 different prophecies, with sixty-one different details about the Messiah, were precisely fulfilled by Jesus hundreds of years after they were written by Isaiah and other prophets. And the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that these prophecies were written well before the birth of Christ. (See <http://y-jesus.com/wwrj/5-was-jesus-messiah>)

The odds against one person fulfilling all of these prophecies are staggering. And there could have been no collusion, since they were written over a period of 500 years by men who didn't know each other. Ravi writes,

“The spread itself defies natural explanation. Long before all converged in the person of Jesus Christ, His coming was envisioned, foreshadowed, and described in detail.”[20]

Ravi was convinced that as the promised Messiah, Jesus was the “Mighty God” who came to die for us just as Isaiah had foretold hundreds of years earlier. He reasoned if we can believe God for hundreds of prophecies, then it makes sense to believe Jesus’ claims about himself.

Although Jesus’ fulfillment of prophecy was compelling evidence for the truth of his claims, Ravi wanted to know if evidence existed for Jesus’ resurrection.

He read that Jesus was reported by many eyewitnesses to be alive. Over 500 saw him at one setting. And his tomb remains empty today as it was 2000 years ago. His followers were so convinced in his resurrection that they gave their lives proclaiming it as true. Ravi realized that if Jesus truly did rise from the dead, he would have answers about the path to God that no one else has been able to demonstrate.

Several skeptics have tried to prove that Jesus’ resurrection was a legend, or a hoax plotted by his followers. Two brilliant skeptics even began writing books attempting to prove the story was fabricated. One was a brilliant journalist; the other, one of the founders of Harvard Law School. Neither of them thought the resurrection was an historical fact. However, both of these skeptics became persuaded by the evidence that Jesus actually did rise from the dead.[21] (See <http://y-jesus.com/wwrj/6-jesus-rise-dead>)

Most scholars who examine the evidence are convinced that something happened shortly after Jesus’ death that changed his followers, and ultimately history. It was their conviction in the risen Christ that launched Christianity. Dr. E. M. Blaiklock, former Professor of Classics at Auckland University, concluded:

“I claim to be an historian. My approach to Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history....”[22]

Ravi became convinced by the historical evidence that God had spoken through Jesus, and that he alone is the way to God. He writes,

“It was Jesus’ victory over the grave that provided the grand impetus for the early church to tell the world that God had spoken, and indeed, had done so in a dramatic and incontrovertible manner. All this transpired in history, and is open to the historian’s scrutiny.”[23]

Ravi discovered that Jesus is a living Savior who loves him, died for him, and defeated death. And because Jesus defeated death, he could believe his words about God, the way to God, and how to have eternal life.

In contrast to the uncertainty of the priest, Ravi realized that the ashes we leave behind are not the real us. Our real identity is eternal, and because of Jesus, we have hope beyond the grave. That assurance was the hope and meaning Ravi had been seeking. He decided to put his faith in Jesus as his personal, living Savior. Ravi explains,

“I came to Him because I did not know which way to turn. I have remained with Him because there is no other way I wish to turn. I came to Him unsure about the future. I remain with Him certain about my destiny. I came amid the thunderous cries of a culture that has three hundred and thirty million deities. I remain with Him knowing that truth cannot be all-inclusive. Truth by definition excludes.”[24]

God Reaching Out To Us

In contrast to other religions, which are based upon man’s performance in one form or another, the unique message of Christianity is that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, put on human skin.[25] And his purpose was to

die for us on the cross, so we could be forgiven of our sins, and have eternal life. [26] This message is radically different from all other religions. D'Souza notes,

“Religion in general is man’s strategic manual for how to reach God. Christianity is not a religion in this sense. Christianity holds that man, no matter how hard he tries, cannot reach God. Man cannot ascend to God’s level because God’s level is too high. Therefore, there is only one remedy: God must come down to man’s level.”[27]

In other words, we are not capable of paying our own penalty for sin. All other religions devise ways for us to try, but none are able to bridge the huge chasm between God and us. But God the Son became a man to pay our debt. His death on the cross, as a sinless man, paid our sin debt in full. All we have to do is receive him into our lives.[28]

As one reads the Gospel narratives about Jesus, it becomes evident that Jesus is always reaching out with compassion to those he was with. Only Jesus Christ can do that, since as God, he is not limited by time or space. Ravi observes, “We think we are looking for Him. We find out that He has come searching for us.”[29]

So who will be there for you and me in our hour of need? Who will be there for us in our final hour as we near death? Who can we trust with our future? The priest Ravi asked says we can’t know. Oprah’s many ways to God won’t help us either. But Jesus conquered death, and paved the way for us to live eternally with him.

As Ravi discovered, Jesus alone promises to be with us now, and to be there for us when life ends. He who claimed to be, “the way, the truth, and the life,” is the very one holding out his arms saying, “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.”[30] He invites you and me to do just that.

Endnotes

1. Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville, TN: Word, 2000), 14.
2. Paul E. Little, *Know Why You believe* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1973), 131.
3. See Jesus’ claims in “Did Jesus Claim to be God”: <http://y-jesus.com/more/jcg-jesus-claim-god>

[4] <http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Wolves/oprah-fool.htm>.

4. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 101.
5. John 14:1-4.
6. John 14:6.
7. Acts 4:12.
8. 1 John 5:11, 12.
9. Romans 6:23. NCV
10. Cited in, Swami Bhaskarananda, *The Essentials of _____* (Seattle, WA: Viveka Press), 190.
11. Ibid. 7.
12. Ibid. 89.
13. John 3:16.
14. Romans 6:23.
15. Ephesians 2:8, 9.
16. Matthew 11:28.
17. Isaiah 53:1-15.
18. Isaiah 9:6, KJV.
19. Zacharias, 163.
20. <http://y-jesus.com/wwrj/6-jesus-rise-dead>
21. Cited in Josh McDowell, *Skeptics Who Demanded a Verdict* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989), 85.
22. Zacharias, Ibid.
23. Ibid. 6.
24. John 1:1-3, 14.
25. Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 5:8.

26. D'Souza, 286.
27. John 1:12.
28. Ravi Zacharias, *Light in the Shadow of Jihad* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2002), 108.
29. Matthew 11:28.