

Jesus

The angel, Gabriel, announced to Mary that she would conceive in her womb and bear a Son after the Holy Spirit has come upon her. Jesus was born of a virgin. This is a glory of Christmas. He is King forever. He rules as King and Savior now over His kingdom. We who believe in Him are now part of that Kingdom. That is a glory of Christmas.

Go with me to Luke 1:31 to find another glory of Christmas. As we learn of this glory, it too will give us reason to worship this Christmas season.

We will go back to verse 30 to hear the beginning of the message of Gabriel.

30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus.

Prayer.

It was a similar message to Joseph in Matthew 1. The angel goes further in explaining saying, "You will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So, as Mary gave birth to her son, he called His name Jesus.

Jesus the English equivalent to Joshua or as you will see or hear the Messianic Jews name Him, Yeshua." The name says it all, "Jehovah saves." It is the primary reason for the coming of Christ. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and the save that which was lost."

Many passages of scripture can be found that tells this truth. For our time this morning, I want to consider a passage found in Acts. Acts 4:12 is the focal passage. Let's go there and look at the previous verses to catch things in context.

Peter and John are arrested and brought to the Sanhedrin. The charge is preaching Jesus resurrected.

Peter speaks in defense beginning with verse 8. Let's pick up with verse 10 at what is being said.

10 Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

11 He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief cornerstone.

12 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."

Verse 12 is a verse worthy of being put to memory. It is a key verse of scripture. It is also a verse that offends many in our nation today largely because there is a way of thinking and belief that is greatly influencing many because we live in a pluralistic society.

The system of belief or thinking is called pluralism. Pluralism is a way of thinking and believing that says there are multiple ways by which one can obtain eternal life.

Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other belief systems or philosophies all offer valid paths that lead to eternal life.

Surveys conducted in the last 12 years bears evidence of how pluralism has affected our American culture. The evidence is found by comparing surveys, one taken from 2005-2010 and then more recent ones. Earlier surveys indicate that 90% of young adults who are not evangelicals had pluralistic beliefs in the first survey. That has increased to 91 to 93%. Among evangelical young adults, the number has increased from 70% to 76%. I don't know what region of the country this was taken. Regardless, I hope this is of concern to you.

So when a person hears or reads verse 12, they are taken back, thinking or saying, "How dare Christians think their way is exclusive."

In being refreshed on pluralism by reading, I came across one term that constantly popped up. It is the term "approximation of truth." It's not absolute truth, but kind of sort of the truth. It is close to the truth. It demands that we relax some of the rigid rules so that everyone is included.

Well, let's put that principle to skydiving. If you go skydiving at the Southwest Florida Skydiving Club in Punta Gorda, Florida, you can count on two things: (1) an exciting experience and (2) the need to follow some basic rules.

Before you participate in a dive, your "Jump Master" will give you the following instructions:

Don't curl up into the fetal position. (You can slip out of your harness.)
Arch your back and hold your arms out in front of you. (To keep you from slipping out of your harness and to get you flying in the correct position.)
Stick your legs out in front when landing. (No explanation necessary.)
Do everything your jump master tells you to do. (Immediately.)
No pets allowed on your jump.

These are not negotiable, especially if you want to live. They are absolutes. Now let's imagine another skydiving experience. When you arrive a smiling instructor begins strapping a parachute to your back while walking you toward a plane idling just outside. Over the plane's engine noise the instructor yells, "We here at the Pluralism Skydiving School believe there are many ways to get from the plane to the ground. We respect everyone's desire to skydive and we don't believe in absolute rules. Just listen to your inner voice, respond honestly to your feelings, and have a memorable experience. We'll see you when you get down!"

As I thought about this pluralism thing, it came to my mind that there are some things that all religions and faiths actually have in common.

First, There is a Universal Problem With Mankind or Humanity

It seems in reading and hearing of this pluralism thing, all believe in eternal life. That should not come as any surprise to us. God has put in us an awareness of the existence of eternal life. It is that to which humanity longs for including atheists. They just won't own up to it.

The universal problem is that there is also an awareness in humanity that something will keep up from reaching the longing for eternal life that we have. There is a shortcoming. The Bible calls that sin. Anything we think, say, or do that breaks God's law.

Romans 3:23 teaches All have sinned and come short of God's glory.

Second, There is a Universal Quest to Solve the Problem.

This is where we get into the differing of beliefs as to how to fix the sin problem. Most all religions and philosophies, as far as I can see, say do this and this and this and you will experience the release of bondage from whatever is burdening us.

The way I see it, most all religions and philosophies are a works kind of thing. "I hope that my abiding by these rules, living my life as clean as possible, doing what is demanded of me, hopefully, God, in whatever form or person He is, will see my good works and give me eternal life.

There are even people who call themselves Christians who do the same thing. If I live right, treat people with justice, don't do the don'ts and do the do's, then maybe I will go to heaven.

If people of religions and philosophies are honest, they still live with the burden that they are not sure their works is enough.

There is a Universal Solution to the Problem of Mankind

The universal solution to the problems of Mankind is Jesus. No one is more needed.

God knew from before the creation of time that we would be unable to solve the sin and the guilt problem. He set out to redeem us back to Himself. The main purpose of Jesus' coming is to solve the universal problem by allowing His Son, Jesus Christ, to take the penalty of sin upon Himself.

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time **Christ died** for the ungodly. Romans 5:6*

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died** for us. Romans 5:8*

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law so that He might redeem those who were under the Law that we might receive the adoption as sons. By simple trust in what Jesus has done as opposed to relying on our own doing to be right with God, the problem with humanity is solved. We have forgiveness of sin. We have eternal life.

Whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

Hassane spent his first 12 years of life being trained and finely groomed in Islam. He was zealous in his belief ready to defend the honor and tradition of Islam. At age 12, he was enrolled in a boarding school in large city in his home nation of Niger. Before leaving for school, his teacher gave him one solemn warning: You may meet some people who are called Christians."

To his disappointment, the school he enrolled in had three Christians with the rest being Muslims. He went to the principal and said, "No Christians should be here!" To step up the opposition against the Christians, he started and taught a study of the Quran. One day two of the Christians came to the class. One was very well versed in the Quran. Hassane went to talk with him. The Christian assured that he will remain Christian but challenged Hassane to read the Big Black Book, the Christian Holy Book. He remembered his teacher saying, "They have a big black book. Never read it."

He did. For three and a half years, Hassane secretly read the Big Black book. One day as he was reading, these words stopped him dead in his tracks. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. This not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that one can boast."

He struggled a few more months. Finally he prayed, "God if what I read is true, I want that salvation. If this is true, I want to be a Christian." He wrote a letter to his twin brother confessing, "I am now a Christian. I want you to be the first to know."

Today, Hassane is a church planter in Niger. It is a persecuted church. However, Hassane is convinced that he is fulfilling the call of God.

Jesus. God is salvation. There is no one more needed. This is the glory of Christmas. Worship Him.