

I Believe In Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

Rich Nathan

February 16-17, 2013

Advent: I Believe Series

Matthew 10:32-38

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **“Restoring Eve”** – Women’s Conference, February 28-March 2, 2013. Register at our weekend services, or online at www.vineyardcolumbus.org. Childcare is available on a limited basis. Contact Liz Ward at 614.259.5335.
- **New Member Recognition** – 134 new members

WELCOME

I’d like to begin today by welcoming our Sawmill Campus, our Lane Avenue Campus, and our East Campus. I’d also like to welcome our tow campus initiatives in Circleville and Mansfield. We’re glad to have you with us.

MESSAGE

Years ago there was a movie titled Being There in which a man named, Chance, played by Peter Sellers, was a mentally challenged gardener, who never left his wealthy employer’s estate after his employer died. So Chance spent every waking minute watching television. The only thing that he knew of the world was what he saw on TV. He began speaking in TV phrases, these empty platitudes. Eventually, he was forced out of his wealthy employer’s estate and he spoke TV phrases to people that he met in the larger world. People not only liked Chance, but they thought he was brilliant. By

speaking empty TV phrases, Chance ended up becoming the President of the United States.

I thought about Peter Sellers in *Being There* the other day when I read a recent study of how TV portrays religion and faith. There is really two ways that faith and religion are portrayed on popular TV according to this media study. First, religion and faith are portrayed in its most aberrant, deviant forms. So, we find the Christian militia types, who have banded together to murder abortion doctors, or kill gays; snake handlers, charlatans, parents who won't allow their diabetic child to receive insulin because they believe God will heal their little girl without the use of medicine.

Either faith and religion are portrayed in its most deviant, most corrupt form, or faith and religion are portrayed in a thoroughly unspecified, watered-down, lowest common denominator in which there are vague references to God and prayer and afterlife. We don't know exactly where the speaker is coming from, what particular religion they identify with. Frequently on shows like *House* there will be a debate between atheism and religion, or faith and science.

Television, because it is a mass medium, wants to reach as broad an audience as possible, so it lumps everyone who has faith of any kind in one category and then people who are atheists in the another category. Faith is usually portrayed on TV as being really aberrant, or in its watered-down, most generic type despite the fact that

well over 90% of people in America, who attend a religious service, go to a Christian church and that the total attendance at all churches every week in America is about 75 million. And those 75 million people are almost entirely not going to snake handling murderous cults. There will be on TV almost no mention of distinctively Christian doctrines, or distinctive Christian beliefs or practices.

So what are these 75 million people in America involved with? What does it mean to be a Christian, not just in a television vague, watered-down, generic statements about God, or the lowest common denominator beliefs about the afterlife, or vague statements about the power of prayer, or the power of faith? What we find, if we actually go to a church, or we listen to a Christian, is that Christian faith centers on a person named Jesus.

Now, many people in other religions respect Jesus greatly. Mahatma Gandhi, the founder of modern India, although he declared in his autobiography that it was impossible for him to regard Christianity as a perfect religion, nevertheless, he said, he had a great admiration for Jesus and loved Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which he said went straight to his heart.

Many Muslims show considerable respect to Jesus. They acknowledge Jesus as one of the great prophets. He is referred to in more than a dozen passages in the Quran. The Quran affirms that Jesus was born of a virgin. In the Quran it says that Jesus was sinless.

It speaks about his miracles, his inspiration by the Holy Spirit, and his second coming. I have personally seen the “Jesus Minaret” on top of the Mosque in Damascus, Syria where many Muslims believe Jesus is going to return. And though Mohammed denied that Jesus was the Son of God, because he thought of this title in physical terms, that God actually had to have sex with a woman, nevertheless, he acknowledged Jesus to be the Word of God.

Many contemporary Jews are now talking about Jesus. Because of the long history of anti-Semitism, which was present especially in the European Church, many Jews in the past never considered reading the New Testament, or learning about Jesus, but that is changing. In the past few years there are many Jewish authors from lay people to rabbis who have written about their admiration for Jesus. One woman, Amy-Jill Ravine, coeditor of the Jewish Annotated New Testament, said:

SLIDE

Jesus is a Jew. He spent his life talking to other Jews. In reading the New Testament, I am often inspired, I am intrigued. I actually find myself becoming a better Jew because I am better informed about my own history.

Benyamin Cohen, an orthodox Jew, spent a recent year going to church. He admitted that he is jealous that Christians have Jesus. He wrote:

SLIDE

Jesus is a tangible icon that everyone can latch onto. Judaism doesn't have a super-hero like that.

Cohen wrote in his 2009 book titled My Jesus Year:

SLIDE

I'm not advocating for Moses dolls,

He said. But he argued:

SLIDE

It is hard to believe in a God you can't see. I'm jealous of Christians in that regard, they have this physical manifestation of the Divine they can pray to. There could be more devout Jews than me who don't need that, but to a young Jew living in the 21st century, I wish we had something more tangible.

Cohen went on to say:

SLIDE

I was shocked when I went to church and heard them give sermons about the Old Testament. I had no idea Christians read the Old Testament. One week, I went to church

and the pastor gave exactly the same sermon my Rabbi did the night before about Moses and the Burning Bush, and the pastor did it much better than my Rabbi. I understand Christians' love for Jesus and I respect that. If anything, I learned a lot from them and did become a more engaged Jew, a better Jew, and I appreciate my Judaism more because I hung out with Jesus.

Today is the first weekend in Lent. Lent, for those of you who weren't here last week, is the 40-day period between Ash Wednesday which was this past Wednesday and Maundy Thursday, the night of Jesus' Last Supper without the intervening Sundays. It's 40 days. It is a period of time in which Christians across the globe do some spiritual spring-cleaning, get rid of some of the clutter in our lives, and make more space for God through practices like fasting, or refraining from social media, or choosing not to watch television, giving up coffee, or alcohol. And during this season of Lent Christians also engage in more positive things. I've urged many of you during this season of Lent to join a small group here – a women's group, a men's group, a coed group, a Joshua House group. I've urged you to finally join the church, to engage in acts of service by volunteering at our food pantries.

The purpose of Lent is to draw closer to God and to get ourselves ready for Holy Week where we celebrate Jesus' death and his resurrection.

During this season of Lent I'm doing a series from the Apostles Creed. Today we're going to look at the second clause in the creed: I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord. Let's pray.

SLIDE – The Apostles Creed

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
Born of the Virgin Mary
Suffered under Pontius Pilate
Was crucified, dead, and buried
He descended into hell
On the third day he arose again from the dead
He ascended into heaven
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty
From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead
I believe in the Holy Spirit
The holy universal Church
The communion of saints
The forgiveness of sins
The resurrection of the body
And the life everlasting. Amen.*

The longest part of the Apostles Creed is the paragraph concerning Jesus. There is more about Jesus in the Apostles Creed than about anything else. You see, the Christian faith is not generic religion as it is portrayed on television – vague references to spirituality. The Christian faith is not simply affirmations about the power of faith, or the power of prayer, or belief in the afterlife. Christian faith is very specific; it is very particular. And it focuses upon a person named Jesus.

Bishop Stephen Neill wrote in his book titled Christian Faith and Other Faiths:

SLIDE

The old saying “Christianity is Christ” is almost exactly true. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged, and in the light of which it stands or falls.

In other words, the uniqueness of Christianity is very simply Jesus Christ. Let’s look at this clause in the Apostles Creed: I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord.

SLIDE

I believe in Jesus

Again, the Christian faith centers on a person. Christianity is not an ism – it is not Marxism, or Capitalism. It transcends all of the boxes that everyone in the world wants to put you in. Are you right wing, or left wing? Are you conservative, or liberal? Are you a Democrat or Republican? Folks always try to push people into one of these boxes. But Christians reject all of those boxes. I’m not saying that there is nothing in any ism, that there’s nothing in any political party. We’re saying Christianity is so much bigger than that because it centers on this infinitely wonderful, infinitely powerful, infinitely holy person named Jesus, who cannot be put in any one of our boxes and could not be

put in any box of his day! Are you a Pharisee, a Sadducee, an Estine, a Zealot? Are you a Roman sympathizer? Are you a Revolutionary?

Jesus transcended all of those boxes in his day; he transcends all of the boxes of our day. Christianity is not an ideology; it is not a political perspective; it is not about partisan politics. It is about Jesus.

What are we saying when we say: I believe in Jesus? We're saying:

SLIDE

Jesus existed

Now this may be obvious to all of you, but you can read scholars that say it doesn't really matter, if the person Jesus actually existed. What really matters is his philosophy. My response to that has always been, if Jesus didn't exist, then we need to bow down and worship the person who actually taught this philosophy. But Christians believe that the things we say about Jesus are not just rooted in philosophy. They're rooted in history. The things we read in the New Testament actually happened.

It is virtually impossible, friends, to be a responsible historian and to question whether Jesus existed or not. There is wide ranging evidence that there actually was a person named Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in the 1st century AD. Josephus, who was born a

few years after Jesus' crucifixion and who received a rabbinic education from his parents and at age 19 joined the Pharisees and remained a faithful Pharisaic Jew for the rest of his life, wrote a history of the Jewish people that was completed probably about the time that the Gospel of John was completed. And Josephus, this non-Christian Jewish Pharisee wrote about Jesus. He said that Jesus was a performer of unusual works and miracles. That he was opposed by Jewish leaders which led to his crucifixion. Josephus' statement was:

SLIDE

When Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, [Josephus writes] even Jesus' death did not stop the emergence of a new faith.

Josephus refers to James as the brother of the "so-called Christ." There are other references to Jesus by Roman historians, and later Jewish sources also assumed Jesus' existence.

There is not evidence in the century after Jesus lived that those who opposed the Christian movement ever denied Jesus' existence. Jesus was a real person in history.

And what are we saying when we say: I believe in Jesus? We're saying more than I believe Jesus existed. We're saying: I believe

SLIDE

Jesus saves

Jesus would have been known to his childhood friends and to his family by his Hebrew name, Yeshua, or we would say in English, Joshua. The name Jesus comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Yeshua. What does the name Jesus or Yeshua mean? We're told this in the wonderful story of the dream given to his adopted father, Joseph. We read this in Matthew 1:20:

SLIDE Matthew 1:20

CLOSING

Remember, if you are not part of a small group, be sure to stop by and talk to someone at the Small Groups Counter after the service to help you get connected. And on your way, remember to serve the poor by putting a dollar or two in one of the clear plastic boxes on the walls near the auditorium exits. Bless you all, and have a great week!

Campus Pastors, I'm going to turn the service over to you now for prayer and ministry.