

# Kenmore Baptist Church Message Outline: LOGOS, 18/4/10 (PM/BW+DB)<sup>1</sup> MANY PATHS, ONE DOOR: *How to Choose a Religion-or None*

## *Many Paths, but Which Door? ... Overwhelmed by Choice, Underwhelmed by Criteria*

Australian society represents a rich variety of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. With people from so many different countries living in Australia, with so many different beliefs and cultural practices, we are confronted with the problem of deciding which 'religion' and worldview is the right one, if any.

Yet, there has been a trend in society to argue that it actually doesn't matter what you believe as "You just need to be sincere." Or, it doesn't matter what you believe as "All religions are really the same, grasping at part of the truth, but each path leads to God in its own way." This is sometimes called **Pluralism**, and it is the idea that ***all religious paths, and all major worldviews like atheism, are equally valid and it is impossible to judge other religions and truth claims.***

Pluralism, though, is a wrong path and a dead end. Distill it down, and there are four main ways people argue that we needn't *choose* a religion at all.

## *A Dead End: PLURALISM ... All Paths are Equally Right/Wrong*

### ***#1: "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere."***

Sincerity is vitally important. Everyone dislikes a hypocrite. But sincerity is not enough. We would never apply this to any other area of life like science or history, and it is inconsistent to apply it to religion alone.

### ***#2: "Aren't all religions pretty much the same?"***

This idea has great appeal in a world full of violent conflict between people of different religious views. Actual worshipers and scholars within different faiths, however, agree that the religions are superficially similar, but essentially different.

### ***#3: "Surely all religions lead to God (even if they are different) in their own ways"***

There is an appearance of humility in saying all religions see only part of the truth. Ultimately, though, it is an arrogant claim that you (without divine help) see the whole truth, while everyone else is blind. The religions are mutually exclusive as they have irreconcilable beliefs about the existence of 'God', whether there is an afterlife, what the afterlife is like, and how one can attain it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Want a Small Group Guide for this talk, with activities, discussion questions, further reading, and full notes?* Check out <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/> and follow the *resources* tab to '*Many Paths.*'



- Don't demand certainty, give up searching, or follow your feelings. *Instead ...*
- Be *Open*: every religious 'room' *may* be richer than you presently know
- Be *Critical*: don't settle for cheap answers, lest you overlook the problems.

### ***The Process: Three verbs to Guide Your Search***

- *Understand*: Understand a belief system
- *Ask*: Ask the right questions of each belief system
- *Assess*: Humbly assess each option and commit to live what makes most sense

### **Step 1: Understand**

- Aim: *Understand* what the various alternatives actually claim
- Read a reputable and 'neutral' introduction, e.g. John Dickson's *A Spectator's Guide to World Religions*
- Get your own foundations right first: face your doubts head on + grab a copy of *The Essential Jesus* (Gospel of Luke) + DVD *Jesus: Fact or Fiction* + read Tim Keller's *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*<sup>3</sup>
- Follow a similar process for other religions: watch the life and listen to the advice of a devout believer + get a feel for their scriptures and how it is explained by leading thinkers in that system + be open and critical to *understand* the worldview as it *explains itself*.

### **Step 2: Ask**

- Aim: *Ask* the right questions to engage each worldview's essential answers
- How well does this belief explain *the material world*? ... "*What is science?*"
- How well does this belief explain *the nature of humanity*? ... "*What is love?*"
- Any 'door' worth entering should have solid answers to these phenomena.

### **Step 3: Assess**

- Aim: *Assess* each option fairly and live what makes the most sense overall
- Choose your criteria up front, and equally apply them to each worldview
- **Key Criteria:**
  - Coherence* (the belief hangs together without contradiction);
  - Correspondence* (the belief can be tested, either verified or falsified);
  - Completeness* (the belief explains all phenomena, i.e., universe + our nature);
  - Liveability* (the belief helps you survive and thrive, complete in itself)
- Every belief (including your present worldview) involves trust, so commit to entering which ever door is most warranted—*most true, good, and beautiful*
- Truth shines brightest under scrutiny ... *but*, perhaps God offers us not an infallible system but an infallible person, *perhaps Jesus?* (Matthew 16:13-17)

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<sup>3</sup> Want some good reading to start out right? Try these: C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*; John Dickson, *Simple Christianity*; N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian*.

## A Starting Point: PERSON ... Some Warrants to Knock on Jesus' Door

Skeptical of pluralism, embracing the process, but *where should I start my search?*

- How about **a person**? Instead of a true system, start with a *trustworthy guide*
- Jesus is universally acknowledged as the 'model' human. Can you find a higher pattern, a more consistent character, or a nobler person? *He's unique:*
- Other guides point us to God, but *Jesus uniquely brings God to us* (John 1:18);
- Other guides describe living in a world of evil and suffering, but *Jesus uniquely dealt with human wickedness by dying on the cross;*
- Other guides suggest how to face death, though they all went to the grave. *But Jesus uniquely broke death as the final barrier through resurrection;*<sup>4</sup>
- Other guides teach us how to live by offering enlightening moral advice, but *Jesus uniquely offers to live within His followers, providing power to change.*
- The most humble person, a servant leader, simultaneously made the most audacious claims, to *be* God in the flesh. He can't be just a 'good teacher'
- In a world of many religious paths, Jesus claims to be "*the path, the truth, and the life. No one gets to the Father apart from me*" (see John 10:9-10; 14:6)
- Convinced or not of his claims, *consider starting your search with Jesus.*

## Many Paths, Which Door? ... An Account, and a Challenge

- Like Ravi found, the greatest 'search' is a loving God looking for lost humanity
- Knock and doors open; taste and see that God is good (Luke 11:9; Psalm 34:8)
- *Challenge:* Start your search with Jesus—the logic behind the universe, and the love that brings us home (John 1:1-14; Romans 5:8). *Have you met him?*

*Willing to Embrace the Search? Take a step of trust and say this to Jesus right now:* "Jesus, right now I'm pretty confused. It's beyond me to navigate this labyrinth of paths. But if you're there, I need your help. Would you guide me now? Would you show up and give me eyes to see the way to life? Show me the next steps to take that I might find the right door to enter that leads to God? And above all, would you give me a heart to respond to your advances, as you search for me."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What intrigued, inspired, agitated, or gripped you most in this message?
2. What has been your journey thus far to choose a religion or none?
3. As you see it, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the 'pluralist' option to religion, where all the paths and doors are equally right, and/or equally wrong?
4. *Understand, Ask, Assess ...* How seriously have you searched out Christianity? What one next step could you take to follow this process both for establishing what you currently believe, and openly and critically engaging beliefs other than your own?
5. Who do you say that Jesus is? How well does this match Jesus' own teaching concerning himself? If you're open, pray that he will guide your search to God.

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<sup>4</sup> *Did Jesus really rise from the dead?* Listen to <http://www.mediafire.com/?zdmmyggigg>.