

Good morning. My name is Matt, if you don't know. I'm new here at Sherwood Oaks. Just this last week. I've been pastoring in Bloomington for over 30 years.

But I love Bloomington. I love what the kingdom of God is in Bloomington, and I'm grateful to be here. So, hey, let me say something up front. I found out during the first service that a couple of my note pages were sticking together because of log cabin syrup. So if I don't make any sense at some point, can we disagree?

We're going to blame it on log cabin. So I kind of made sure it was all smooth there. So it was just kind of one of those things like, why can't I get that off there? So anyway, my wife doesn't use syrup, so it has to be me. So let me start off with this statement.

It seems arrogant to say that Jesus is the only way to God.

If you're honest, you probably agree with that statement. It feels that way. Jesus is the only way to God, especially in light of all the world religions, you know, from left to right on the top, that's mormonism, the next one I've never seen before. But I put it in there where they set a symbol for atheism. It's got some science y stuff going on in there.

The next one's Buddhism, the wheel, Taoism down below, Islam, Judaism, and then the middle is the far end. In the orange is Hinduism. It's like. So we think Jesus is the only way to God. Isn't that arrogant?

Isn't it ignorant?

There's 8 billion people in the world, 8 billion. At best estimates, 31% of the world is christian. And you might know by that, I don't necessarily mean they're all followers of Jesus, but it's a christian country, a christian town, or whatever. So that means 69% of the world, five and a half billion, grow up in cultures that are buddhist, muslim, hindu, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So five and a half billion people.

So isn't it arrogant that we say Jesus is the only way to God? We at least need to be honest about that question and that statement that maybe it does sound arrogant, but we're going to talk about that today. But here's the question of the day. The series is asking for a friend. So it's all these questions we have that we're not sure if we're supposed to ask them.

But the question of the day is this. Does it really matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere? Does it really matter? I mean, isn't sincerity. Isn't that what the gods want anyway?

And does it matter? It is one of those questions that you want to ask

it, but you kind of think you're not supposed to because you might get your hand slapped in church by asking it. But let's first talk about the word sincere, because that's where we have to start. So I was in my early. Before I went to seminary and became a pastor, I was a junior high math teacher.

So those of you who have math anxieties, just calm down, all right? Just calm down right now. All right? But I was talking to another math instructor friend of mine once, and he visited his kids in their grade school class. He just wanted to watch and see what the teacher was doing.

And this is what the teacher was doing with math, all right? This is addition to fractions, so don't get too hyped up here, all right? One half plus one third equals one plus one is two. Two plus three is five, equals two fifths.

Those of you who are laughing know that's not right. Those of you who are not laughing are like, wait, why is this wrong? All right, so this friend of mine went to the teacher after class and said, just so you know, that's not the right way to do it because you need to get a common denominator, which would be six, and you have to change the numerator. Even those words are freaking some of you out. Numerator now, right?

I. And so you went back the next week, she was doing the same thing. Add the top at the bottom. And he went up to her afterwards and she said, I told you. And this guy was a math professor.

I told you last week, that's not really the right way to do it. And she said, oh, that's okay. That's how the kids and I like it. She was sincere that we like it that way. We like it.

It makes sense to us. But the realization is it wasn't factual, so you can be sincere and not factual. When I graded junior high math papers, I didn't try to figure out their sincerity level. If they had it wrong, it was wrong. The red pen came out.

So let's just say it up front. That sincerity, why? Really good. We all want to be sincere. We don't want to be fake or hypocritical.

Sincerity and devotion, it's good, but it's. What's true is what we have to wrestle with. So today we're going to wrestle with or talk about not sincerity, but facts. And this, I'm going to say, we're talking about the fact of Jesus. And you might say, wait a minute.

But even if you don't accept the Bible as inspired by God, which we do here, but if you don't at least agree with me, the Bible has historical significance, and the stories told here have pretty close accuracy to what might have happened and what Jesus might have said.

So let's just deal with the fact of Jesus, historical fact of Jesus and what he said. All right, so we're gonna look to John chapter 14 to start with. Not to start with. We're gonna end there, too.

So John chapter 14 takes place. It's the night Jesus is gonna be betrayed. And I'm doing this. Cause they were all sitting around a table, usually this high off the ground. They were all sitting there, and they knew something might be up because Jesus had an intensity about him that maybe was, hmm, something's different.

So he's talking to them, and this is what he says. This is John chapter 14, verse one. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Which must mean he knows there's times where our hearts are troubled. Trust in God.

Trust also in me. There was more than enough room in my father's home. If it were not so, I would have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so you will always be with me where I am, and you know the way to where I am going. And then I love this reaction of Thomas.

He didn't ask for a friend. He just blurted it on out there. No, we don't. Lord, we have no idea where you're going to. How can we know the way?

We're confused by what you're saying. It's okay to be confused by things that Jesus is saying because of the disciples. After three years, if they were still confused, it must be okay for us to go into that confusion arena and ask some of these hard questions that we're asking for a friend. It's okay. Thomas is like, we don't understand what you're talking about.

We don't know the way. And then Jesus says this focal verse of the day. He says, I'm the way and the truth and the life. No one can come to the father except through me. That's going to be our zeroed in on verse today.

Jesus said this. I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

Say those two words to start with the word no. No one. Say it again. No one. No one can come to the father.

Except through me. So the disciples, when they heard this, they were Jews. They were good Jews. They would have known in the Old Testament the phrase, there is no God like our God or you God. There's no pagan God like you.

They knew there was this clear sense of the God that they worship, stood above the pantheon of the gods, like this was our God is unique. Now Jesus is saying this, that I'm the way to that God that is unique,

not shared among the world's gods, unique. And Jesus said, and I'm the way. The disciples obviously caught that, especially post resurrection, because in acts chapter four, Peter and John Heal a beggar or hear a lame Mande who leaps and praises God. And then they get pulled into the Pharisee court and they're like.

Because it was a big rumble about what happened. They said, in what name? By what power did you heal this guy? And they say, there's only one name given under heaven by which we can be saved. Saved doesn't just simply mean ticket into heaven, but it's by which we can be made whole again.

There's only one name. See, the Pharisees, they weren't upset. They did a good deed. They weren't upset. They were handing out furniture as international students.

They were upset that it was being done in the name of Jesus. So this idea of the one Jesus is, I'm the way. And the disciples, their message was one name, one way, one name. So now, what did we do with that? Back to the sincere people.

So I'm going to talk about some people I had a chance to interact with ten years ago. I did a series of church I was at where I interviewed in front of the congregation, different spiritual leaders in Bloomington. And I basically asked them two questions. They knew these questions were coming. Question one was, how does your religion define the good life and a good person?

That's what we want, right? That's what life is. I want the good life. I want to be a good person. But the second question I asked them, and they knew it was coming.

What do you think of Jesus? All right, so let me start off. I'm going to introduce those people to. They're not here, but I'm going to introduce you to them. So I want to start off with, I made this sign this summer.

Not for this sermon. I just made it because I do quirky things like that occasionally. But I think I'm supposed to use it today. So I want to start off. When we think about other people who are sincere, I want us to start with a clear understanding that Jesus is for everybody, right?

Jesus is for everyone. Say that with me. Jesus is for everyone. All right? He's for everyone.

He's not just for those born in Midwest America and the 21st century, all right? He's for everybody. So let me tell you about these people, and I'm going to use their real names because I'm not going to say anything about them that I didn't talk to them about, and I'm not

going to mock them. We don't mock people who have different beliefs. We engage them in conversation.

So first person I interviewed, that one Rabbi sue. Some of you might know her. She's on campus. Rabbi. So Rabbi sue, obviously she's jewish.

So I remember when I asked her the question, what do you do with Jesus? Her response was, that's a really good question. But Rabbi sue, devout Jewish, doesn't believe Jesus is the only way to know God. So I'm putting them all around this imaginary table here. Next person was Brent.

Brent was the bishop of the ward of Bloomington Mormon Church. So we had good conversation. The Mormons have a different understanding, that you might use similar language about who Jesus is. But when you dig down and clarify some definitions, Jesus was the result of the heavenly Father and the heavenly mother having a child together. And we're all spirit.

It's different. It's not the same Jesus. And in our conversation, he clearly told me that I'm not in the right group. It was kind. We had a good conversation.

It wasn't hostile. He said, well, actually, no, you're not, because they have a different view of Jesus and a different view of what a good life is. And the good life is kind of following all the precepts of the book of Mormon, that kind of thing. So that's Brent, third person. I'm going Tutan, also known in Bloomington as the leader of the tibetan buddhist monastery, the 8th Argia Rinpoche of Buddhism.

Argia Ranpoche means the exalted one who's been reincarnated. He was told from age two he was the 20th reincarnation of a 13th century buddhist leader. He leads over the, I don't know which way the tibetan buddhist monastery is. I'm probably pointing the right direction somewhere close by. Right.

They're the guy where the purple, the maroon and the yellow had a really good conversation with him, asking him about Jesus. But Jesus is one of the many people who have reached enlightenment, but he's one of many. So that's Tubden. So we have Rabbi sue, we have Bishop Brent, we have the monk Tubdin. Then we have Zaheede.

Zahed was a leader at the time on the board of the islamic center of Bloomington. They don't have it in Oman, they just have. So Zahed is an engineer. I think it crane or somewhere. We had some really good conversations.

Islam will be pretty strong against Jesus dying on the cross. They believe the last minute there was a switcheroo and somebody else died,

but not Jesus. And they would also. This I found fascinating. The book of is the Quran teaches that at the end of time, guess who comes back to the world?

Not Muhammad. Jesus. And I ask him, what does Jesus come back to do? Qur'an doesn't say they don't believe he was dead and resurrected. But it's like, it's always intriguing to me how Jesus is pretty creative of at least getting his name out there.

I don't mean that in a trite way, if you know what I mean. So that was Zaheed. I went to some Ramadan meals with him. It was a good experience for me. But he was very devoted, very devoted to like Rabban on fasting.

So we have Rabbi Sue, Bishop Brent, the monk tubtan, Zaheed. We also have Sam. Sam by his own definition was a progressive, is a progressive gay christiane who would simply say Jesus is a way for me, but not for everybody. You might have heard people have said that. Sexuality aside, people have said, well, he's the right way for me, but refraining from saying he's the right way for the world doesn't know God.

So that's Sam. I don't want to throw somebody in there I've never met, but you might have heard the north sentinelese centelese islands. Anybody have any awareness of that? It's an island off the kind of west of the coast of India where the Sentilles are a tribe that is unreached and untouched by modern everything. I mean it's like spears, bow and arrow and loincloth around their waists.

They've killed many westerners who've tried to go there. It's against the law, indian law tell you should go to the island because they want to protect them. Language isn't known, isn't written down. So we assume they own the Bible. Right?

If they don't have a bible and they probably never heard of Jesus, well, let's put them at the table too just to make things more interesting. Right? So we have these people, you know, our bishop, a mormon bishop, muslim leader, jewish, buddhist. What does God think about them? I mean, we know Jesus is for them, right?

He's for them. He's not against them, he's for them. But what do we do with them? Just for sake of reference, you know, in Jesus day, he had, he interacted with a samaritan woman, a roman officer, talked about the widow of Zarepath. He talked about foreigners being welcomed at the table of God.

But again, Jesus always knew he was the central piece. So let's talk about these people. And, I mean, I'm going to talk about six things we know God has said that will help us understand what does God think about these people? All right, number one, what you've already said is

there's one way to know God. Jesus said, I'm the way.

He was pretty clear about that. The disciples said one name so that we will anchor and never waver on that. Right? One way. Okay.

The second thing we know God has said is God has God's love the world. John 316. He loves these people. He knows their names. He's counted the very hairs on their heads.

He loves them. So we know that's true. Third thing we know is he's merciful. Peter says in two. Peter, God doesn't want anyone to perish.

He wants all to come to repentance. He's for these people.

Next thing we know, the fourth thing. Of the six Romans, one, Paul says, if even through creation and God's eternal qualities seen in creation, people can be drawn to God, so they have no excuse not to worship God, not to worship the gods, but not to worship God. They have no excuse.

Book of Ecclesiastes says, the God has planted eternity in the hearts of every human being. There are stories of tribes, aborigine tribes, in, like, Papua New guinea, where a missionary showed up and the tribe said to them, are you the one that's going to tell us about God's son and bring us the holy book? They had never had missionaries there before. Where does that come from? So somehow God was no excuse to say, well, I grew up in a culture that didn't talk about Jesus, but somehow God's saying, I still am wooing people because I've planted eternity in their hearts.

Jeremiah, chapter 29. The fifth of the six things we know of God said is Jeremiah 29 says, if you seek me, you will find me. If you seek me with all your heart. It's kind of beyond sincerity. It's wholehearted, if you seek me.

So that's true of Zaheed, that's true of sue, that's true of sand, that's true of all of them, if you seek me with all your heart, you'll find me. That's the promise of God. So we have. God's only way is Jesus. God loves them.

God doesn't want anybody to perish. There's no excuse to not know and pursue God. And if you do seek him, you'll find him. Those are things all God has said the last thing. And this is why I actually thought I maybe should leave this one out, but I'm not going to.

John 336, Jesus says, those who reject the son, those who accept the son, have life, eternal kind of life. Those who reject the son, the wrath of God abides on them. It's like, oof. So there's judgment. We do believe in eternal judgment.

The Bible talks about we can't. So all these six things. Jesus is the only way. God loves these people. He wants them to repent.

They don't have an excuse. If they seek him, they'll find him. And if they reject Jesus, there's judgment. So then the question is, what does God think about all these people? How does he deal with them all?

My best answer is, I don't know. But I know God will be absolutely consistent with those things. He's already said. God's ways aren't our ways. God will not skirt on Jesus being the only way.

God will always want people to repent and not perish. God's already said there's no excuse. God said, if you seek me, you find me. But there's also judgment. God in his mercy and his wisdom and all the things he's already said in scripture, he will be consistent with what he said and those people God will deal with according to what God has already said.

So we just have to trust. Sounds simplistic. I'm not saying it that way. Trust God on this one, that Jesus is the only way. Still, we don't know how exactly, but nobody knows God because they were a good Mormon or a good Muslim or a good buddhist.

Nobody. Everybody knows God only because of the work of Jesus. And it's nothing. Sometimes I think, we think, and I'm saying myself, we think the majority of heaven is going to be populated by Americans because we're a christian nation. I think we'll be shocked, of course, but just because somebody was born in the middle of tibetan Buddhism, do they have a lesser chance of knowing God than you and I who were born in christian homes?

I think everybody has equal opportunity. God has an equal opportunity. God. He wants all to know him. He wants all to know Jesus.

So how does that work? How do we do all that? So we know that's true and we know God is consistent with those people. He's consistent with what he's already said. So all roads lead to God?

No, we can't say that. You can say it. You just can't support it. With the Bible. You can believe whatever you want to believe, but if you're going to support it by the Bible, you can't say all roads lead to God because the Bible doesn't say that.

Jesus clearly doesn't say that. Jesus is a way for me but not for others. You can say that. You just can't say it standing on the Bible. You can't because Jesus didn't say that.

All right. Our religion, same God, can't say that. You can say it. Can't say it from the Bible. The Bible is clear.

There's no God like you, no God among the pagan gods like you. God is unique. Jesus is unique. There's only one way to God. And I actually add to this, there's a variety of ways people get to Jesus.

You all have different stories of how you got to Jesus. You hear about people in the Middle east having dreams about Jesus. You hear about tribes that have never had a missionary know there's something about the son of God that's supposed to talk to them. So Jesus is quite competent. Thank you.

He is. And able to reach anybody he wants to. Scripture says that God. Jesus said, actually, Jesus said this. No one can come to me unless the father draws him.

So that means God is active in drawing. He has to be active in drawing these people or your friends. He has to be active in drawing them. I don't know. I just thought about this, watching this video, the furniture video.

I saw it in the first service, too. It's very possible that God used that ministry to draw some of these people to Jesus or at least turn them in that direction. God's quite creative about how he draws people. So we don't realize all the things we can or can't do that God will use to draw people to Jesus. So I want you to think about even like, think about friends you have.

And in this town, it's a good chance all of us have friends or acquaintances or coworkers who are from other religions. You know, maybe stick their name in your head or put their face on your screen of your head.

Jesus is for them.

He's for that person you're thinking about. And maybe your role, not maybe your role, maybe we pray God. Jesus said that you nobody can come to Jesus unless you draw him. Would you draw this co worker of mine to Jesus? I have no idea this happened to Jesus.

He's Muslim, he's buddhist, he's an atheist. I don't know any way that's going to happen, but supernaturally, Jesus told us God will do that. So I'm going to ask you, God, will you draw this person to Jesus? Will you draw this person to Jesus? My friend, my neighbor, my coworker, would you draw them to Jesus?

So whether you're sincere or not, it's not the issue. Jesus and I'm. I teach classes at IU occasionally, and I had a student come up to me after class one time. I tell him I'm a pastor the first day of class, and he told me later it kind of freaked him out. I was like, why?

And why? I thought you'd put John 316 on the slides every day. I was

like, why would I do that? It was an education class. Why would I do that?

Because that's what Christians do. That's what he said. And I said to him, he said, aren't you a Christian? This is my standard response. I said, I don't call myself a Christian because that doesn't mean anything anymore in this country.

I call myself a follower of Jesus. He's changing me. He's changing the world, because we are followers of Jesus. We're not simply Christians. That can be a cultural term.

So to finish up, I want to finish, and I will finish on Jesus. The backside of my sign again, I made this December. Just because these are the things I think about. Follow Jesus. Read the yellow with me.

There is no one like him, all right? He's not one among many really good people, social activists, good teachers. Yes, he was those things, but he's raised from the dead, so we're followers of Jesus. The best thing you can do for your non-Christian, other religious friends is you follow Jesus. Because you follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit starts to work in you toward other people.

And so there's a couple last things I want you to take away. Number one is this. Jesus can be trusted. He can be trusted. What he said can be trusted is true.

He's trusted. We can trust him. You can trust Jesus with your money, with your sex life, with your relationships, with people you need to forgive and don't want to. You can trust Jesus with your future, with your anxiety about your job. You can trust him.

What he said is true, and he's consistent with all that God has said. And Jesus has said, you can trust Jesus. And the last thing I'll say is this. Jesus is Lord over all, not just Midwest Americans. But I want to add this.

He's Lord over all of me and all of you. Which, again, means he's Lord over my money, for my sex life, over my friendships, over how I spend my time. Because if I believe Jesus is Lord for everybody, it's got to start with Lord for every part of me.

So that's. Is it you? So I'll finish with this about Jesus. Like I said, follow him. There's no one like him.

Let me describe Jesus to you. Jesus is powerful, he's terrifying. He's amazing. He's explosive. He's fierce and he's focused.

He's confrontational, controversial and supernatural. He's never hurried, never manipulative, and never selfish. He's truthful. He's

blunt. He's disruptive.

He's courageous enough to say what everyone else won't say. He's playful. He's witty. He's dynamic. He's sensitive, compassionate, and incredibly kind.

Jesus is brilliant. He's wildly free and absolutely holy. He's full of truth and full of mercy. He's misunderstood, rejected and betrayed. He's mocked.

He's tortured. He's crucified. He was dead.

But now he says in revelation one, I'm alive. He was supernaturally raised from the dead. He is now alive and holds the key to death. And like we sang earlier, he is worthy of it all because from him are all things, and to him are all things. Jesus is worthy of everything you have to give him.

Let me pray. Jesus, you love us. We know that. We want to know that more. But you love our friends and neighbors and coworkers who don't follow you.

Use us in whatever way you want to God, whether it's through handing out furniture or having conversations, whatever. Or praying for people that the father would draw them to. Jesus use us to help others see the beauty and the wonder and the power and the majesty of Jesus. We love you, Jesus. We ask this all in your name.

Amen. So now we have response time.

She always responded to Jesus, but a couple different things. First is communion. Jesus said, then I was betrayed. Every time you eat this and drink this, remember me. Remember me.

He doesn't want us to remember that you're bad people, and he had to go to the cross for it. He wants us to remember all the promises he gave of life inside of you. So maybe the one thing you remember when you take this is I can trust him. So there's in the little containers. There's cups with juice and bread on the bottom.

We come up during the song, take one of those. Most people take it back to their seat. You can eat it wherever you want to take it back to their seat. Do the bread and the cup. And Jesus said, when you do this, you're proclaiming something about me every time you even eat this and drink this.

That's one way of responding. Another way you'll see people who have orange lanyards around who are here to pray for you, and maybe you just need somebody to pray for you. They're going to trust Jesus more. Maybe it's something else in your life that you're struggling with. I

just need to trust Jesus more.

Use those. Use the power of their prayers. Right? Some people, there's also, if you want to give, there's giving boxes up here, too, as a way of respond. And there may be some of you who think, I want to follow Jesus.

And maybe this moment you're thinking, I'm going to get baptized. Jesus said, you know, you repent and believe and follow, then you get baptized. And we're having a baptism, I think this service and the next service. So if you want to get baptized, you can talk to one of the people in the orange lanyards and we'll arrange that for you as your expression of following Jesus. All right, so let's worship Jesus and respond to Jesus.