

Jesus Among Other Gods

by Ravi Zacharias

Chinese Gospel Youth Group

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Outline of Tonight's Program

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Introduction

▪ ***Jesus Among Other Gods*** by Ravi Zacharias

- “The purpose of this book is to lay out for you, the reader, why I firmly believe Jesus Christ to be who He claimed to be – the Son of the living God, the One who came to seek and to save a lost humanity”

▪ The world in which we live today can be summarized by:

- Religious pluralism; all religions are the same, or lead to the same destination

▪ The claim that all beliefs are true, from the outset, is clearly wrong. Consider:

- To deny this statement would also then be true, and all beliefs then are ***not*** true
- Even other religions themselves do not say that all religions are the same (e.g. Islam)
- If all religions are the same, then why do religious elders get so upset when people convert to Christianity? Every religion at its core is exclusive... but not all can be true.

▪ Jesus said in *John 14:6* :

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Can the exclusive claim of Christ be true? What gives Jesus the authority to say such things, and why should we believe Him?



Addressing a Heavenly Home: Where was Jesus from?

▪ Read *John 1: 35-46*

“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter) The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip."



Addressing a Heavenly Home: Where was Jesus from?

- Jesus claimed that He was from a heavenly dwelling, from above (*John 3:13, John 8:21-23*).

- Jesus' disciples were obsessed with His origins
 - When Jesus' disciples encountered Him, they asked “Where are you staying?” or “Where are you from?”
 - Disciples were curious about Christ's earthly home; Jesus wanted to show them His heavenly dwelling... “Come, and you will see”
 - “In the East, the home was (and still is) a defining cultural indicator. Everything that determines who you are and what your future bodes is tied to your heritage and your social standing. Absolutely everything.” - Zacharias

- Christ's heavenly dwelling is unique among any world religion
 - All other leaders who claimed for themselves divine status had a beginning, but Christ did not. Preceding His birth was eternity.
 - Islam claims that at one point in his life, on one particular night, Mohammed was transported to heaven on a single journey, to be given a glimpse of what heaven was like. Heaven was foreign to Mohammed, and that is point of significant difference.

- Two main points of evidence that support Jesus' claims of heavenly origin:
 - Jesus was conceived without consummation (i.e. born of a virgin)
 - He led a life without blemish



Addressing a Heavenly Home: Where was Jesus from?

Conception without Consummation

“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.” –

Luke 1:26-38

- “When one is searching for evidence to confirm a startling claim, it is necessary to look for some other source that gives credence to it, even though it would not be in its own best interests to do so.” -Zacharias
- Jesus’ virgin birth was a claim that had clear possibility of being verified along many lines. This was claim that would have been easy to disprove... had it not been true!
 - For Mary to claim such an outlandish conception would have been not only to risk her own life, but also to have put her baby’s life at risk
 - Particularly significant because this was predicted long before Christ was born... Perfect fit of hundreds of prophecies with fulfillment (Passages?)
 - Testimonies of Zacharias and Elizabeth; in their culture, having your own child as ‘second fiddle’ to someone else’s was social suicide, especially a younger cousin
 - Islam, which for centuries stood against Christianity, affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Surah 19.19-21)... yet despite this miraculous conception, Muslims deny that Jesus is the Son of God



Addressing a Heavenly Home: Where was Jesus from?

A Life without Blemish

- Jesus' life has always been regarded as the purest, not just by Christians. His adversaries tried but were never able to bring any contrary proof against Him (*Luke 23:1-4, 13-16*).
 - By contrast, no other individual has ever elicited such claims. By their own admission, this includes Mohammed, Buddha and Krishna. Their lives and struggles are recorded within their own scriptures.
 - There are many more differences and contrasts between the lives of Mohammed and Jesus. Mohammed's marriages to eleven wives is difficult for Muslim scholars to explain: clearly establishes the gradual need to die to one's self so that the two can become one, a process of failing and picking up, never one of perfection.

- Never even a hint in the life of Jesus that He was ever driven by sensuality or needed to seek forgiveness for anything (*Hebrews 4:15; Luke 4:1-13*).
 - Hinduism: account of Krishna's exploits with milkmaids an embarrassment to many Hindu scholars
 - Buddhism: fact that Buddha endured rebirths implies a series of imperfect lives. He went in search of an answer. Jesus came with the answer
 - Jesus alone emerges as the spotless One, untainted by any error of omission or commission

- Also, contrast the way that Mohammed and Jesus understood their call
 - Mohammed claimed to have been confused he first 'received revelation'
 - Jesus from birth knew exactly who He was and where He came from (*Luke 2:49*)



Quest for Reason: Why can we *trust* Jesus?

The true intent of skeptics

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who **suppress** the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is **plain** to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been **clearly** seen, being **understood** from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. – **Romans 1:18-23**

- Bible is clear that the problem with people is not the absence of evidence; it is, rather, the **suppression** of it.
 - Denial of Christ has less to do with facts, and more to do with what sinners have already concluded in their minds.
- Thomas Nagel, Professor of Philosophy at NYU:

“In speaking of the fear of religion, I don't mean to refer to the entirely reasonable hostility toward certain established religions... in virtue of their objectionable moral doctrines, social policies, and political influence. Nor am I referring to the association of many religious beliefs about superstition and the acceptance of evident empirical falsehoods. I am talking about something much deeper – namely the fear of religion itself... I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and naturally, hope there is no God! ***I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.***”



Quest for Reason: Why can we *trust* Jesus?

The true intent of skeptics (continued)

- To such a mind, *no amount of evidence* would ever be enough
 - Look at the Pharisees (e.g. *John 6:30, Matthew 12:38*). It was not the absence of a sign that troubled them; it was the message behind the signs that provoked their discomfort
 - In fact, in both above accounts, demand for a sign came immediately after miracles had been performed... John - Jesus walks on water, and Matthew – Jesus casts out a demon)

An Aside: The demand for a sign itself is a proof for existence of God

- Is the demand for a sign not a sign in itself?
 - We demand signs because we are intelligent beings, seeking evidence because we thinking, and thinking because we have a mind. But surely the complexity of our mind, and our ability to reason cannot be a result of chance, or evolution...
 - Chandra Wickramasinghe, Applied Math Professor in Wales: Statistical probability of forming even a single enzyme, the building block of the gene, which is in turn the building block of the cell, is 1 in $10^{40,000}$. It would require more attempts for the formation of one enzyme than there are atoms in all the stars of all the galaxies in the entire known universe.
- Who has to have more faith?
 - The Christian who uses his mind to trust in god, or the one who, without any attempt to explain how his mind came to be, nevertheless uses that mind to demand a sign, yet disbelieves God?
 - Bertrand Russell, famous writer and atheist, when asked to explain the existence of the universe: "It's just there."



Quest for Reason: Why can we *trust* Jesus?

But why is Jesus trustworthy?

Reason 1: *His life and teachings were utterly consistent*

“A true defense of any claim must also deal with the evidences that challenge or contradict it. Truth is not only a matter of offense (in that it makes certain assertions), it is also a matter a defense (that it must be able to me a sensible response to counterpoints that are raised). A challenge emerges as to whether to trust a claimant to deity that may have some unique features that attract, while covering up a multitude of contradictory teachings or lifestyle. The entire life of anyone making prophetic or divine claims must be observed in concert with their teaching.” - Zacharias

- His consistency is precisely what makes Jesus so unique
 - The whole range of both His life and teaching can be subjected to the test of truth, and proven utterly consistent

- Faith for the Christian is the response of trust based on who Jesus *claimed* to be, and what He *did*, and it results in a life that brings both mind and heart in a commitment of love to Him.
 - That Jesus was utterly consistent in all He said and did makes our faith not only reasonable, but ***absolutely reliable***.



Quest for Reason: Why can we *trust* Jesus?

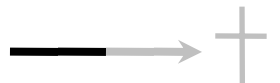
But why is Jesus trustworthy? (continued)

Reason 2: *His physical resurrection is His greatest proof of all*

“Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.” – **John 2:18-22**

- Jesus gave the greatest proof of His authority by accurately predicting His death and the time of His bodily resurrection.
 - The fulfillment of this prediction reveals Jesus’ uniqueness above all contenders
 - Consider this: in all of history, all a skeptic has ever needed to do to disprove the claims of Christ is to produce His body... surely with all the forensic and archeological technologies of today this wouldn’t be hard. But this has never happened. Jesus proved precisely what He said He would.

- An aside: Implications on the sanctity of human life
 - It is in our bodies that the Lord dwells: **we** are His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19)
 - This body is deemed worthy of respect and reverence
 - Contrast to pantheistic religions and new age thinking; body is extension of universe, no intrinsic value of our bodies over any other matter



A Taste for the Soul: How does Jesus satisfy?

Jesus *Himself* is the Bread of Life, and none but Christ can satisfy

- Hunger is deeply rooted in us... we have legitimate hungers for all sorts of things:
 - Food, drink, love, companionship, truth, justice, etc...
- But Christ's message affirms that no one thing will meet all of these hungers; more importantly, nothing can satisfy man's deepest hunger in our souls, except Christ Himself.

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." – **Matthew 26:26-28**

"Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty... I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." – **John 6:35, 47-51**

▪ Jesus *Himself* is the Bread of life

- At the heart of every major religion is a leading exponent. At some point there emerges a distinction between person and the teaching. Mohammed, to the Koran. Buddha, to the Noble Path. Krishna, to his philosophizing.
- By contrast, Christ not only taught His message. He was identical with His message. He did not just proclaim the truth or show the way. He said "I **am** the truth" and "I **am** the Way."



Is God the Source of my Suffering?

- Read *John 9:1-11*

“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent).

So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."



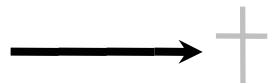
Is God the Source of my Suffering?

- Answer to suffering goes deep in the understanding of the nature and severity of evil.
 - As we'll see, the Biblical world-view is the only one that accepts the reality of evil and suffering while giving both cause and the purpose, while offering God-given strength and sustenance in the middle of it.

- Suffering is real, universal and complex
 - *Every* world-view must give an explanation or answer for evil and suffering
 - Either evil categorically proves that God doesn't exist (atheists), or evil is 'not ultimately evil' (pantheist), or evil is most coherently explained by the Christian view of God and His purpose in creation.

- Most people ask how can there be moral justification for evil?
 - But the Bible affirms that it is much more important to ask: ***Why do we exist? What is the purpose of our being?***
 - C.S. Lewis: When a ship is on high seas, there are at least 3 questions that must be answered. How do we keep the ship from sinking? How do we keep it from bumping into other ships? But behind these two lurks the most important one: Why is the ship out there in the first place?

- Christ's message addresses the heart of the matter, as we shall see later



Is God the Source of my Suffering?

The Atheist's world-view of suffering: Two Protests to God's Existence

Protest 1: *God cannot exist because there is too much evil evident in life*

▪ Christianity easily contradicts this

- “If evil exists, then one must assume that good exists in order to know the difference. If good exists, one must assume that a moral law exists by which to measure good and evil. But if moral law exists, must not one posit an ultimate source of moral law, or at least an objective basis for a moral law? Objective means something that is transcendentally true at all times, regardless of whether I believe it or not.” – Zacharias
- Atheist: evil exists, therefore God doesn't.
- ***Christianity: objective moral values exist, therefore God must exist.***

Protest 2: *Evil doesn't actually exist... we are all simply 'dancing to our DNA'*

“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design no purpose, no evil and no other good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.” – Richard Dawkins, renown Atheist

▪ This is supposed to be an answer!? If DNA neither knows nor cares, what prompts *our* knowing and *our* caring?

- Imagine telling a rape victim that the rapist merely 'danced to his DNA'? Or victims of the holocaust that their tormentors mere danced to their DNA!
- While seeking an answer to the question of evil, the atheist ends up denying the question... what contradiction! →



Is God the Source of my Suffering?

How Hinduism and Buddhism attempt to answer

- In pantheistic religions like Hinduism, all good and evil fuse into one ultimate reality (*Brahman*)
 - In Brahman, Krishna says, all distinction breaks down; that which appears evil is only a lesser reality, and ultimately all things are a part of divine reality (i.e. all is in god, and god is in all)
- There really is no way for Hinduism to deal with the problem of evil
 - Denying evil is real doesn't diminish wickedness, nor does it daunt the heart's desire to seek purity.
 - We can see this especially in so many of the 'purification rites' in Hinduism, which often include self-infliction of pain
 - One of Hinduism's strongest criticisms of Christianity is in the days of British rule, and the evil of being exploited!
- Buddhism preaches that behind the real world is actually impermanence
 - Once we know that there is nothing permanent, not even the self, then we stop craving... in this state of 'enlightenment' the self is extinguished and all desire, and therefore suffering, is gone
 - Note: this isn't the same as what the Jesus says about the world (Matt 6:19)... Scripture says that the world is wasting away because of the effects of sin, while Buddhism views the present world and its desires as an illusion.
- Two fundamental contradictions to this
 - If the world is impermanent, what is the explanation to the origin of impermanence and the seduction of the mind to see these as permanent? In other words, why do we need to keep reminding ourselves that nothing is permanent?
 - If the world is impermanent, then neither will our state of 'enlightenment' be permanent if ever even attained, so we'd never escape suffering anyways



Is God the Source of my Suffering?

The Christian view of suffering: 6 Key Biblical Truths

Truth 1: *God of the Bible reveals Himself as the author of life, and as the Being in whom all goodness dwells (2 Peter 1:3, Matthew 19:17, Mark 10:18)*

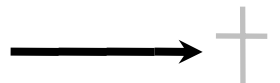
- Goodness is the very **nature** of God
- But not only is God good, He is absolutely holy – the ‘otherness’ of God
- God’s holiness, in turn, conveys an intrinsic sanctity to our lives, because we are His offspring; wasn’t it this recognition that prompted the question in the first place? If my birth is sacred, then what wrong merited my blindness?

Truth 2: *If God is the author of life, then there must be a script and a purpose (Jeremiah 29:11-13)*

- Remember C.S. Lewis’ most important question: Why do we exist?
- Bible says that our God-given purpose to glorify and worship God, that His work would be seen in our lives (John 9:3)

Truth 3: *God reveals to us the sacred nature of his love, to which He calls us (Romans 5:8)*

- Sacred nature of God’s love was demonstrated in Christ’s obedience at the cross (*Ephesians 5:25-27*)
- God’s sacred love drives us to lead lives of worship (*1 John 4:19, Mark 12:30-31*)
- If life is born out of sacredness, neither goodness nor love is the goal. It is reverence, and it must be chosen even when it is hard and costly.
- Old English words in wedding ceremonies... “With my body, I thee worship.”



Is God the Source of my Suffering?

The Christian view of suffering: 6 Key Biblical Truths

Truth 4: *In Christ's suffering on the Cross, we see both the ultimate face of evil and the goodness of God*

- While not the cause of it, God ultimately uses evil and suffering to display His glory (*Romans 5:1-2; Col 1:19-22*)
- It is often through the darkest evil (whether experienced or revealed to us) that our hearts yearn for the goodness and forgiveness that only comes from God (e.g. Saul's conversion – *Acts 9:1-5; Galatians 1:13-17*)
- Suffering and pain did not spare the very Son of God; yet through this tremendous evil, God's provision of hope was seen... the same hope that sustains us through our trials; Paul calls this the 'hope of glory'! (*Col 1:27*)

Truth 5: *Evil is more than an exterior reality, it is an internal reality for which we need forgiveness*

- The Bible is clear that sin is the corruption of the human heart, from which all suffering, pain and its horrible consequences, erupt (*Romans 3:23*)

Truth 6: *Meaninglessness in life does not come from being weary of pain, but from being weary of pleasure*

- This is an obvious truth that is conspicuously absent from the arguments of skeptics
- It is not pain that has driven our generation to emptiness; it has been the drowning of meaning in the abundance of our pleasures
- *Spiritual blindness* is the greatest of pain and suffering, because it is the one thing that accentuates all other suffering in our lives... without the cross to gaze upon, there is no glimpse of God's hope for us through the inevitability of evil in the world, and in our lives



Conclusion

Ultimately, Jesus was who He claimed to be, and He alone is able to seek and save lost humanity, freeing us from the bondage of sin and death.

He who came from His heavenly dwelling, who lived a faultless life but who willingly sacrificed Himself on the cross for our sins, ultimately proved His authority and displayed His glorious power through His resurrection.

Suffering and evil are very real, as a result of our sin. But Christ provides us peace that surpasses all understanding (*Philippians 4:7*).

Jesus Christ alone is worthy of our worship and reverence. Pray and seek His forgiveness for your sins today, and receive Him into your heart to be your Lord and Saviour.

