

## **The Trouble with Christianity: It's too Exclusive!**

### Small Group Discussion Guide

**Opening discussion:** What is one common expression of “trouble with Christianity” that you hear? In other words, what objections do people raise, which keep them from considering Jesus?

**Read** John 14:1-6.

- What is the setting for these verses? Look back at chapter 13 if necessary to get a sense for what was happening when Jesus spoke these words.
- What is your initial reaction to Jesus' claim in v. 6?
- On Sunday, Pastor Josh summarized the topic currently under discussion—as follows: “Why is Christianity so exclusive? How could Christians believe that there is only one way to God and eternal life? Isn't that an arrogant, intolerant, narrow-minded way of thinking? Don't all roads lead to God? Shouldn't anyone who sincerely believes in God and tries to live a good life get into heaven?”
  - Why is this an important topic to discuss?

**Discuss:** Walk through the sermon outline below. Take time to discuss any questions that may come up, as well as the italicized questions along the way.

#### **I. The Uniqueness of Jesus' claim**

- A. Jesus says that the way to God is through a person, and he is that person. *How does this claim differ from other religious systems that you have heard of?*
- B. The unique method in which eternal life is offered. The life that Jesus uniquely gives is received by faith in Jesus. *How does this approach set apart Jesus' way from all the others?*
- C. The unique purpose of his salvation. He offers not an escape from, but transformation of this world. *How do you feel about the idea that Jesus offers not escape from this world, but redemption of it?*

Consider what Jesus is NOT saying in this claim:

- ❖ Jesus is not saying that the institutional Christian religion is the way to God and eternal life. *Why is this observation significant in our culture?*
- ❖ Jesus is not saying that there is no truth to be found in other religious systems or philosophies. *How do you feel about this statement? Can you think of examples of good advice that comes from other religions? How do they fall short of getting us all the way to eternal life with God, as Josh stated?*

#### **II. The necessity of Jesus' offer**

- A. The problems with pluralism. (Pluralism says that all the major world religions provide independent access to the divine reality.) *Have you ever heard anyone argue for this position?*
  1. *Can you think of two or more religious perspectives that are logically so contrary to one another that it is impossible for them to lead to the same conclusion?*

2. This position is making exactly the kind of absolute truth claim that it wants people to avoid. *Talk about the analogy of the blind men and the elephant. How does this analogy show the pluralistic view to be making an absolute truth claim?*
- B. Jesus uniquely shows us the problem of all humanity and Jesus uniquely provides the solution.
1. *What is meant by the statement, "The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart?" Have you experienced this reality in your life?*
  2. *Read Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 3:10-12. How is it that even when we are doing good things, our motives are often corrupt?*
  3. *We heard on Sunday that this problem usually expresses itself in our efforts to create our own meaning and identity, rather than receiving the meaning/identity that God offers us in Christ. Do you agree that most sin can be explained in this way? Why or why not?*
  4. *How does Jesus uniquely provide a solution to this problem? See Galatians 2:21.*
  5. *How do other religious views fall short of this solution?*

### III. The wonder of Jesus' claim

- A. Jesus' way is wonderful because it is clear and specific. Josh used an illustration of a woman who was trying to get to Penn Station, to show that when you want to reach a specific destination, you need clear directions. *As opposed to the pluralist view ("all roads lead to God"), how does the way of Jesus offer clear direction?*
- B. The way of Jesus is wonderful because it really works. *How have you seen this in your own experience? In other words, what confirmation have you seen in your life that Jesus truly gives life and transformation?*
- C. The way of Jesus is wonderful because it is the most inclusive of any religion. What is this statement talking about? Agree or disagree? Read Revelation 7:9 and 22:17.
- D. The way offered by Jesus is wonderful because of the kind of people it produces. When you tell someone that they have an exclusive corner on the truth—and that they are saved by performing that truth—it tends to produce divisive, oppressive, even hateful people. This is the reason why many people resist Christianity, based on the assumption that it is exclusive in this respect. *But how does the gospel of Jesus turn this notion upside down?*
1. (Leaders: the gospel of Christ says, "You are not saved by your performance—in fact, you are no better than anyone else. Jesus saves non-performers like us by his radical gift of grace." When we savor this truth and it penetrates our hearts, it produces humility, love, and a desire to bring redemption to the world.)
  2. *What new insights have you gained through this discussion? How can this perspective change the way that you relate with Jesus? How can it change the way that you dialogue with other people about Jesus?*

**Share and pray.** Talk with one another about your current needs. Pray for one another and for Three Village Church (pray for church leaders, and for our ability to be a beacon of hope in our community).