

Victory of the lamb
April 25, 2020
Ben Sadler
Who Told You That?
Aren't all religions basically the same?

All the bad news has been overwhelming. Each day there seems to be more bad news about the spread of the coronavirus. There is bad news about the economy. There is bad news about broken families and the mental health crisis. In the middle of all this bad news, more and more people seem to be looking to religion or, more accurately, some form of spirituality for hope.

And I think that is a good thing. For the past few decades, less and less people seemed to be interested in spiritual matters. But now people are asking spiritual questions and looking for spiritual answers. And there is this idea that any religion or any spirituality is true and helpful.

We are continuing our sermon series called **"Who told you that?"** This series is all about recognizing the different voices that we are listening to. You see, for the first time in history we have access to an unlimited amount of information in our pockets. And these phones are constantly teaching us and disciplining us. And we don't always evaluate the messages that we are hearing.

One of the messages that you might have heard is, "All religions are basically the same". In other words, all forms of spirituality are basically telling you the same message. All spiritual practices will help us become better people.

In this sermon, we want to look at this question, **"Aren't all religions basically the same?"** We want to see if that is true.

Let's evaluate this statement. Well, as you look at most religions and spiritual practices, you could put them into the category of, at best, good advice. Many religions give you a set of practices and rules to follow. Meditate. Fast. Pray. Follow these commands. And many of the commands are good advice. But what almost none of the religions and spiritual practices offer is good news. And that is what we really need right now is good news.

There is only one religion, one form of spirituality, that offers good news.

In this series we are looking at Paul's letter to the Romans. At one time, Paul was completely against Christianity. He believed Christianity was a problem. So he persecuted the church and tried to imprison and even kill anyone who believed in Jesus. But then he met the resurrected Jesus. And he came to see that Christianity was completely different than any other religion in the world because at the heart of Christianity it "Good News".

Paul wrote about this good news in his letter to the Romans. Paul is writing this letter to Christians that he has never met before. Paul wrote 12 other letters that are in the Bible. And in all those other letters he is writing to people and churches that he was familiar with. But Paul is writing this letter to people that he didn't know and he wants to explain to them the basics of the Christian story.

In the beginning of his letter he says that it is all about Good News. **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the**

Jew, then to the Gentile. (Romans 1:16). “Gospel” is a Greek word that means good news. Paul says that he is not ashamed of God’s good news. He wants to tell everyone about it. God’s good news is the power to save everyone, *First for the Jew, then to the Gentile*. What does it mean? First for the Jew. God’s chose the Jews and worked through them and brought Jesus into the world to reach the world.

Paul goes on to explain this salvation. **For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)** Paul says that this good news, this salvation is about “righteousness”. It is about becoming “right”. Why is that so important? Well, we desperately want to be right. This whole pandemic has exposed our desire to be right. When the pandemic first hit, we had this idea that we were all in this together. Now as time has gone on, we are more and more divided. And there are legitimate reasons for this debate on both sides.

But as time goes on, we seem to feel the need to prove that we are right by showing how the other side is wrong. We are right about the economics or virus or politics. And the other side is wrong.

Jesus told a short story of our desire to right by making other people wrong. Luke writes, **“⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’**

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The religious person wanted to prove that he was right while looking down on the tax collector. He was confident in his own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans he explains why this doesn’t work. He explains why we can’t find our righteousness in looking down on everybody else.

¹⁹ Now we know that *whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. (Romans 3:19)*

Paul is talking first of all to his Jewish audience. He is saying, “Whatever laws Moses spoke was the law that the Jews were supposed to follow.” The problem was nobody was following it. In fact, when God’s people looked at Moses’ laws, they shut their mouth. They stopped acting superior. They stopped looking down on everybody else. They shut their mouth.

Now we don’t live 3000 years ago. We are not the Israelites traveling through the wilderness who are called to follow every ceremonial and sacrificial law. But what if we just tried to follow our own laws? What if we told Google to record everything we said (which I think they are doing anyway). And then we had Google tells us every value judgment we made about everybody else. Every time we said, “They are not doing the right thing medically, economically, politically. My husband or wife is wrong about this.” Then we wrote our own version of the 10 commandments based on the expectations we have for other

people. Let me ask you, “Could you live up to the value judgments that you project on other people?” If we really tried to follow what we expect out of everybody else every mouth would be silenced.

Paul goes on, **Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:20)** We can’t get right by proving that other people are wrong. We are all wrong.

I know we have enough bad news out there. But we need to understand the bad news because Paul is about to tell us the good news.

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. (Romans 3:21) Paul says that “apart from the law God is making people right and good.” And the Law and the Prophets testify to this message, which means “The whole Old Testament” even Moses speaks about this way of getting right.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 3:22) This way of being right comes from trusting in Jesus Christ.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-23) There is no difference before God. No matter what side you are on politically. No matter what your race or background is. We’ve all sinned before God. And the only way to be made right is through Jesus Christ.

How did Jesus make us right? **God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. (Romans 3:25)** Jesus paid for our sins by being a sacrifice for us on the cross. We are not going to be punished for our sins because Jesus was punished for us. That is the good news. The good news is that Jesus lived, died, and rose for you and now you are right with God. God looks at you and he says, “You are enough. You are right with me.”

Here is our first key point.

1. You are enough.

You have nothing left to prove. You don’t have to demonize “those people” so that you feel better about yourself. You are enough.

We have all sorts of issues because of this pandemic. We have a health crisis. We have an economic crisis. We have a political crisis. But most importantly we have a spiritual crisis. We are beginning to see how weak and limited and mortal we are. But the good news is that we are good with God.

Now what are you going to do with that good news? What are we supposed to do with good news? We spread it. And we need good news more than ever. The actor, John Krasinski, has picked up on this. John Krasinski was an actor on the famous sitcom “The Office”. When this pandemic hit and there was so much bad news, he decided to share good news. So he called his YouTube channel “Some Good News” SGN. He has been searching the world for stories that about good news. He highlights stories of nurses and doctors. Also, how high schoolers are finding creative ways to have prom. The YouTube Channel is a big hit because so many people are hungry for sharing good news. His first video has about 17 million views.

This is what the world is hungry for. We want good news. So let's be willing to spread it. Let's spread good news in our families. Let's tell our children, "God loves us. He is with us. His death and resurrection prove his love for us." Let's spread the good news to our friends. Send them a text, "God loves you. He died and rose for you. Because of what Jesus did, you are enough. You don't have to prove anything anymore." Here is the take home point,

2. Spread some good news.

No other religion or spirituality is about spreading good news. Every other religious system will give you good advice about meditating or praying or trying to live a good life. But Christianity is about rescuing God's people. It is about giving us a right status with God. Let everybody you know hear this good news. We are free! We are enough!

At the end of each of Krasinski's episode, Krasinski says, "And remember no matter how dark it gets there is always good in the world." He is right. There is good news still in the world, but where can we find it? What if my bank account is emptying out. And what if my health is failing? What if my family is falling apart? Where can I find good news? On a cross and in an empty tomb. There we find a Savior who makes all the wrongs turn right. All the world made well. And all our hope reawakened. No matter how dark this world gets Jesus will always be a source of good news. Amen.