

The Unique Jesus

by John Stott

This sermon emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, focusing on how he is the Lord, Savior, and personal connection for believers. It delves into the distinctiveness of Christianity in its teachings of salvation, grace, and the personal relationship with Jesus, contrasting it with other religions' concepts. The speaker highlights the foundational truths of Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and theological significance in the Christian faith.

Scripture: Philippians 2:9, Romans 10:9, John 3:16, 1 Peter 2:24, John 10:11, John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 1:15, John 14:23

Topics: "Uniqueness of Christ", "Personal Relationship with Jesus"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, focusing on how he is the Lord, Savior, and personal connection for believers. It delves into the distinctiveness of Christianity in its teachings of salvation, grace, and the personal relationship with Jesus, contrasting it with other religions' concepts. The speaker highlights the foundational truths of Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and theological significance in the Christian faith.

Transcript

I've had a nice cup of coffee and got to meet other people and have a good chat. For our second talk, John Stott is going to talk to us on the unique Jesus. Now John really needs very little introduction.

I think it's suffice to say for today that John is President of the Institute for Contemporary Christianity and is the Rector Emeritus of All Souls Church. So John, we very much look forward to hearing what you've got to say to us. How kind, thank you very much.

Well let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you that it is the chief delight of your Holy Spirit to bear witness to your Son, Jesus Christ. And we ask for his gracious ministry as we continue to think about Jesus together.

Illumine our darkened minds, we humbly pray that we may begin to see Jesus in his divine human fullness and in the satisfactoriness of his saving work. We pray that everything we say and think together today may be pleasing in your sight. For the glory of the same Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

I would like to begin with a couple of scenarios in order to set the scene for our discussion of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The first took place a number of years ago in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria, when a social worker was visiting a young man in one of the back streets of the city. The man was out, but

on his bedside table the social worker found an interesting pile of books.

A copy of the Bible, of course, of the Book of Common Prayer from 1662, a little anomalous perhaps in twentieth century Nigeria, a copy of the Koran, three copies of Watchtower, the magazine of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a biography of Karl Marx, a book of yoga exercises, and what I think the young man needed more than anything else, a popular paperback entitled How to Stop Worrying. That is typical of the syncretistic mood of today. I bring you from Lagos into London, and on Commonwealth Day, the 24th of May 1966, the first multi-faith service was held in St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, I'm sorry to say in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and of the Duke of Edinburgh.

In this service, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians took part on a supposedly equal footing. They made four affirmations of their supposedly common faith. They gave four readings of their sacred scriptures, the Buddhist scriptures, the Bhagavad Gita of Hinduism, the Koran, the Old and the New Testament, and then they pronounced four blessings in only one of which the name of Jesus was mentioned for the first and the last time.

The secular press was, of course, enthusiastic, hailing it as, quote, a significant milestone in religious history. The Christian press, however, had the courage to say that it was a betrayal of the Christian faith. Even the Church Times, which is not known for its evangelical bias, commented, it is impossible to reconcile with the Bible any attempt at religious indifferentism, any neglect of the Christian affirmation that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone.

Now, that was 25 years ago. That language of the betrayal of the Christian faith would emphatically not be used by the Church Times today. I think it probably would by the Church of England newspaper, but things have moved in these last 25 years.

So those two scenarios, one from Lagos, the other from London, are symbolic of the world's increasingly pluralistic societies. The word pluralism is used nowadays in several different senses. I'm using it just to begin with, at its simplest it denotes the fact that there is a plurality of races and of religions in most societies of the world today.

Now, to refer to society as pluralistic does not in itself necessarily make a value judgment on any of the different religions that make up the religious background of the country concerned. It simply acknowledges the existence of a multiplicity of faiths, or as they are sometimes called a multiplicity of faith communities. That's the plurality of religions.

Pluralism nowadays, however, has a much more sinister meaning. It signifies not just the acknowledgment that there are different communities, but the affirmation of the validity of all religions. I'll come back to that later.

So our question together today is how has this situation arisen, and how should Christian people respond to it with sensitivity and with faithfulness? I hope, by the way, you've all got—yes, I think you have—an outline. It's a rather bare outline or skeleton, I'm afraid, and I need to clothe it with a good deal of flesh because it covers both lectures. I begin then first with the multi-faith challenge.

There are three particular moods or movements which have contributed to the situation in which we find ourselves today. A is the global village, that is, the shrinkage of the planet owing to modern communication systems. B is the spirit of the age that magnifies tolerance, and C is the appeal of

syncretism, namely the attempt to amalgamate the best or noblest elements of different religions without having the disagreeable necessity of having to choose between them.

I begin then, A, with the global village. We should know that that is a phrase invented by Professor Marshall McLuhan, the Christian layman—I don't think he's still alive, I forget when he died—but about twenty to twenty-five years ago he was well known as a professor of communications in the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada, and it's he who talked about the global village, the shrinkage of the planet into a little village owing to these complex communication systems. They've caused the world to shrink, and as we travel to other countries and other people travel to ours, we now meet people of different faiths which we did not do so much previously.

Television also introduces us to them, and the comparative study of religions, which is very common in schools today, makes us familiar with the many religions of humankind. Previously other religions belonged to the rather remote places of the earth. Today they are on our very doorstep.

We meet adherents of these different religions on the street and in the supermarket. The global village, the shrinkage of the planet. In the United Kingdom, for example, there are now about a million Muslims who share our little island with us.

The second largest Hindu community in the world outside India is Leicester. The first one is Durban in South Africa, the second outside India itself is Leicester. There are Hindu temples in six, seven, or eight of the major cities of Britain.

Mosques are springing up everywhere, rather prestigious ones paid for by Arab petrodollars in the Middle East. And about a quarter of a million Durban Sikhs are also found in many of our cities, while devotees of modern cults are also flourishing. So in this global village there is an increasing plurality of religions, ancient and modern.

B, I move on to the spirit of the age. Once people began to grasp Einstein's general principle of or theory of relativity, they began probably unwarrantedly to apply it outside science where it belongs, to ethics and to every other situation in our society. Now almost nothing is absolute any longer.

Everything is relative or thought to be relative to everything else. And in a relativistic age, the most prized virtue is tolerance. I don't think there is any virtue in the Western world at least that is more popular than tolerance.

So the question is, is it a Christian virtue or not? I myself found it helpful in reflecting about the meaning of tolerance to see that there are in fact at least three different kinds of tolerance. First, there is legal tolerance, which defends minority rights and protects people's freedom to profess, practice and propagate their own religion or ideology. Now if we're talking about legal tolerance, the protection of the rights of minorities, I have no hesitation in saying that Christians should be in the forefront of those who are demanding such freedom.

Indeed, Christians give far more freedom and protection of a Muslim minority in this country than Muslims give to Christians in any other Muslim country of the world. So we are in favor of legal tolerance. Secondly, there is what might be called social tolerance, which encourages mutual respect and good neighborliness in the community.

Again, Christians should surely promote this. It arises from our recognition of the humanness of the people of all faiths. It reminds us that every human being is a creature of dignity and value made in the image and likeness of God himself.

So social tolerance is good. But then thirdly, there is intellectual tolerance. Intellectual tolerance is to cultivate a mind so broad and so open that there is no keeping anything in it or out of it.

And that is not a virtue but a vice. It is the vice of the feeble-minded who have no convictions of their own. It can degenerate into an unprincipled confusion of truth with error and goodness with evil.

And Christians who believe that God has revealed himself in Christ and has revealed the meaning of truth and goodness in his incarnate Son cannot possibly come to terms with intellectual tolerance of that kind. G. K. Chesterton, who is the lover of the Bourne Moe, as I'm sure we all know. I expect you are lovers of Chesterton too.

Once said, I haven't brought it with me so of course I'm likely to forget it. But he said, what did he say? Lord help me to remember. You know the trouble when you get to my age, you're positively geriatric.

Your memory plays you the most fearful tricks. But it's about the open mind. I'll come back to it.

I'll come back to it. You must forgive me. I must remember to bring these things with me and not rely on my memory.

So we move on, see, to the appeal of syncretism. I guess that total intellectual tolerance, that is having no convictions at all and being tolerant of everybody else's, total intellectual tolerance is a pretty rare phenomenon. Most people feel able to disagree with something and even positively to affirm something or other.

But more popular therefore than total tolerance is syncretism, which is the fusion of different beliefs into a single harmonious system. Dr. Visser Tooth, who was the first Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, a very distinguished Dutch Christian gentleman, in his fine book *No Other Name* published in 1963, gives this definition of syncretism. It is the view that there is no unique revelation in history, but that there are many different ways to reach the divine reality, that all formulations of religious truth or experience are inadequate.

Syncretism is essentially a revolt against the uniqueness of revelation in history. That I think is a very good definition of what is meant by syncretism, and you'll already see that it's very different from pluralism. Pluralism is affirming the validity of each religion, while syncretism is taking what you may regard as the best and noblest portions and forming a kind of religious cocktail out of them.

Now the spirit of syncretism is not new. If I may go on about it for a little bit longer, the natural home of syncretism is India, and the greatest exponent of it probably was the nineteenth-century Hindu mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who reached the conclusion that all religions are, in their inmost content, one and the same. He was followed by that well-known religious reformer, Swami Vivekananda, who made a great impression in the first Parliament of Religions in 1893, which is just—the centenary has just been commemorated, as you will have seen, in Chicago.

And Swami Vivekananda, who among other things in his speech at the Parliament of Religions said, it is a sin to call a man a sinner. You are not sinners, he said. You are angels.

You are children of God. That is typical of Hinduism, the refusal to call anybody sinful and unable to encompass their own redemption. And Vivekananda also taught that all religions are parts of the one supreme reality.

Then in 1875, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York. Its chief founder was Madame Blavatsky, its best-known teacher, Annie Besant, and its teaching that Jesus was one incarnation in a long succession of incarnations down the history of the world. And then in 19th-century Muslim Iran, the Bahá'í Faith emerged, founded by Bahá'u'lláh, and it stresses the essential unity of all religions.

So I say again, the spirit of syncretism is not new. It actually pervaded the Hellenistic world of the first century A.D. There were God's many and Lord's many in those days, as that's a phrase you may remember from the pen of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. So there were God's many, Lord's many, Savior's many. And these many deities tolerated one another in amicable coexistence.

But the early Christians were of a very different frame of mind from modern syncretists. They repudiated what one might call the spiritual polygamy. As the Old Testament prophets were outspoken in their polemic against heathen idolatry, so the New Testament apostles insisted on the absolute uniqueness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I may quote with a toothed again. He said, "It is high time that Christians should rediscover that the very heart of their faith is this. Jesus Christ did not come to make a contribution to the religious storehouse of mankind, but rather that in him God reconciled the world unto himself." So that is just an introduction to syncretism.

Let me come on to my second main section, which is Christian attitudes to other faiths. Many books are being written in our own generation, which are attempting to suggest different approaches to these other religions and ideologies. And an increasing number of scholars today are calling us to change our attitude.

And perhaps the most radical example is the symposium that was published in 1987, edited by Professor John Hick and Professor Paul Knitter, both working in the United States, entitled "The Myth of Christian Uniqueness." Now John Hick edited a book in 1977, entitled "The Myth of God Incarnate." The second myth he is trying to explode is "The Myth of Christian Uniqueness", 1987. And this year he has published another book called "The Metaphor of God Incarnate", saying that the idea of an incarnation of God taking humanity to himself in the historic person of Jesus of Nazareth, that is purely metaphor. There is no reality behind it at all.

It is just a metaphor for the incarnation of, not of God, but of humanness. We see in Jesus a human being who is intensely open to God, but was himself in no sense divine. This is, you see, what is being said by somebody, Professor Hick, claims to be a Christian professor.

He teaches in a Christian seminary in Southern California. And we are going to hear a lot more of this kind of talk in days to come. Anyway, "The Myth of Christian Uniqueness," which I think I have read carefully, calls us to give up the idea that Christianity is superior, let alone unique.

It calls us to renounce all thoughts of world evangelization, that we should proclaim Christ throughout the world and persuade people to come to him. And these books have popularized a threefold classification of Christian attitudes, which you will notice does not include syncretism. Syncretism has now been left behind.

A to A is exclusivism. It is an unfortunate word, but it is used nowadays to describe people, I think, like us. Now, this position has been held almost universally throughout the Christian church or churches until today, until this century. It affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, and that Christianity is unique and discontinuous from other religions.

There is a fundamental break and difference between the Christian faith and other religions. In this century, it is particularly associated with the name of Karl Barth of Switzerland, and it declares the finality, the absolute supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I don't like the word exclusivism because we don't want to exclude anybody.

We want to include everybody in submission to the Lordship of Christ. Nevertheless, that is the word they're using. Now, the second is inclusivism, by which they mean that, yes, God did supremely reveal himself in the historic Jesus, but there is no need for people to become Christians in order to benefit from that revelation of God in Christ.

God can bring and is bringing salvation through Christ, indeed, but to adherents of other religions, so that he brings salvation to the sincere Hindu or the sincere Muslim, yes, on the basis of Christ, but it includes everybody. There's no need to become a Christian in order to receive salvation from Christ. Christianity thus completes other faiths and is continuous with them rather than discontinuous.

Then the third attitude they propose is pluralism, called by Chris Wright, the new principal of All Nations Christian College, the supermarket mentality. I've already suggested that plurality simply recognizes the fact that there are many religions, but pluralism denotes a particular attitude to them, namely that all religions are simply different cultural understandings of the one true God. There is God, unknown and unknowable, but there are different cultural expressions of his reality in different parts of the world, and indeed religions are all cultural. Hinduism belongs to India, and Islam belongs to the Arab world, and Christianity belongs to the West, and Judaism belongs to Israel, and so on.

They're just different cultural understandings and expressions of the divine reality. So they go on in pluralism, We must affirm the independent validity of every religion. We must accept what they call this wider ecumenism and give up the naive attempt to convert everybody. I don't know anybody who's poured more scorn on this idea than unfortunately I remember to bring it this time than Ronald Knox in a wonderful book called Essays in Satire.

He was a Roman Catholic, you may remember, in Oxford, very distinguished in his day, and in an essay called Reunion All Round, subtitled A plea for the inclusion within the Church of England of all Mohammedans, Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins, Papists, and Atheists. And Ronald Knox goes on, In the new and universal Church, the Church of England, nobody will be expected to recite the whole creed, but only such clauses as he finds relish in. It being anticipated that, with good fortune, a large congregation will usually manage in this way to recite the whole formula between them. And having dealt with differences between Christians and theists, he comes finally to the problem of reunion with the atheists. In their case, he says, we have only one single quarrel to patch up, namely as to whether God exists or not.

So he proposes to the theologians that as we believe God to be both imminent and yet transcendent, we should also be able to reconcile ourselves to the last final antinomy that God is both existent and nonexistent. And he ends, Thank God in these days of enlightenment and establishment, everyone has a right to his own opinions, and chiefly to the opinion that nobody else has a right to theirs. It's a wonderful irony, as I think you'll agree. But you know, people are doing that.

Have you read in the papers in the last few weeks about, is his name Anthony Freeman in the Chichester Diocese and the Bishop of Chichester? He's written this book called God in Us, saying that there is no absolute God, there is no objective supernatural deity, that all God is, is our own feelings. It's an attempt to interpret theology in terms of anthropology, and we have nice feelings from time to time, and love and quest for truth, and that is God. So Anthony Freeman actually says, if I can remember it, he says, 'I believe in God, and chiefly I believe that he doesn't exist.' Now that is the kind of contradiction to which they are now coming.

So how do we respond? Well, having gone in my second section through these different Christian attitudes to other faiths, I want to come to my main section three, the case for the uniqueness of Christ. So let us be clear what we are claiming uniqueness for. Not for Christianity in any of its empirical manifestations.

We are not claiming uniqueness for the Church in any of its particular cultural expressions. We're not even claiming uniqueness for theology in any of its many traditional formulations. We are claiming uniqueness for Christ, for the person and work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Because to us, Jesus Christ is not one of many religious leaders. He is not one of Hinduism's 330 million deities. He is not one of the 40 prophets acknowledged by Muhammad.

He is not just the best in the language of religious devotion, as Professor Paul Knitter suggests, that just as a husband says of his wife, 'She's the best woman in the world.' Well, he can't say that because he hasn't investigated all the others. But I mean, it's the language of devotion. And just as he says of her, 'She's the best.' We say of Jesus, 'He's the best,' because He's the best we happen to have come across for the time being.

No, we don't accept that. Nor do we accept that He is the great, as we may say that Alexander the Great or Napoleon the Great or Charles the Great. We don't talk about Jesus the Great.

He is the only. And nothing can be added to Him. He has no peers and He has no rivals and He has no successors.

That is our firm confidence as the followers of Jesus. I hope it's clear then that whatever there may be in Christianity that is unique, the uniqueness we are claiming is in the person of Jesus. I bring three witnesses together, one from Asia, one from Africa, and one from Europe.

My Asian witness is that remarkable man Sadhu Sundar Singh, converted to Jesus through a vision when he was 15 years old, brought up as a Sikh. And he became a Sadhu, a holy man, an itinerant Sadhu until he disappeared one day. Nobody knows what happened to him in the Himalayas.

He once met an agnostic professor of comparative religions in a Hindu college who asked him what he'd found in Christianity that he'd not found in Sikhism, to which he replied, 'I have found Christ.' 'Oh yes, I know,' said the professor rather impatiently, 'but what particular principle have you found? What particular doctrine have you found that you did not find before?' 'The particular thing I have found,' said Sadhu Sundar Singh, 'is Christ.' So I bring you now my African witness, Professor John Mbiti, in his distinguished book on African Religions and Philosophy published in 1969. He simply said the uniqueness of Christianity is in Jesus Christ. Or I come to Professor Stephen Neill as my European, the late Bishop Stephen Neill, he was as well as a professor, in his Christian Faith and Other Faiths.

The old saying he writes that Christianity is Christ is almost exactly true. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged and in the light of which it stands or falls. Later he goes on, rather eloquent, "Christians must persist in their earnest invitation to true dialogue.

They must exercise endless patience and refuse to be discouraged and the burden of all their invitation must be "Consider Jesus." He goes on to lament how hard it is to persuade Muslims even to listen. But our task, he says, is to go on saying to the Muslim with infinite patience, "Sir, consider Jesus." It is not the case that the Muslim has seen Jesus of Nazareth and rejected him. He has never seen him and the veil of misunderstanding and prejudice is still over his face.

So it is the uniqueness of Christ. And wherein is the uniqueness of Christ? Well, Jesus Christ, as you know, is given numerous names and titles in the pages of the New Testament. In recent years, several scholarly studies of the names and titles of Jesus have been published.

The commonest words applied to him are plain "Jesus" and plain "Christ". Often, however, the word, the Lord Christ or the Lord Jesus Christ. But when his name and title are spelled out in their fullness, as they are particularly in the second epistle of Peter, we have "Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." For example, 2 Peter 3, verse 18, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And I want to suggest to you that that full title of Jesus bears within itself a threefold affirmation to which we need to remain faithful.

The first is that Jesus is Lord. If he is our Lord and Saviour, he is Lord, he is Saviour, and he is ours. We must not miss the personal possessive which is added.

So first Jesus is Lord. I hope all of us know the very earliest Christian creed is two words in Greek, "Curios Iesous", "Lord Jesus" or "Jesus, Lord." And when anybody acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus, he or she was recognized, identified as a Christian and baptized and thus received into the Christian community. Because it was recognized, as Paul wrote in Romans 10, "If you confess with your lips, Curios Iesous, Jesus, Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Then it was also recognized in 1 Corinthians 12, 3, that nobody can say, "Curios Iesous, Lord Jesus", except by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who bears witness to Jesus and opens our eyes to see the truth as it is in Jesus and enables us to confess that he is Lord.

Now to say "Curios Iesous" sounds pretty harmless, until you begin to dig into the implications of that affirmation. Now we need to remember particularly that when Jewish scholars in Alexandria in Egypt, which had a very large Jewish population, and many Jews had become Hellenized and no longer spoke Hebrew but Greek, there was a great demand in 2nd century B.C. Alexandria for them to have the Old Testament in Greek and not in Hebrew. So when the scholars translated it from Hebrew to Greek in what came to be known as the Septuagint, they were immediately confronted with the problem, "What would they do with the sacred name Yahweh or Jehovah, as we often call it?" They didn't feel at liberty to transliterate it.

They didn't feel at liberty to translate it. So all they could do with the sacred name that they didn't even feel able to pronounce was to use the paraphrase, "Ho Curios, the Lord." And that is why in our English Bibles today, in the place of Yahweh or Jehovah, we have the phrase "the Lord." That's not an exact translation of the Hebrew, but it is following the same tradition of calling Yahweh Ho Curios, the Lord. I'm no lover of Biblical numerology and I've never worked it out myself, but I'm told it comes 6,560 times in the Old

Testament or in the Septuagint that he is called Ho Curios.

Now the point is this. The early Christians knew this very well. They were familiar with the Septuagint.

They knew that Ho Curios was a divine title. It was equivalent to Yahweh. But although they knew that, they didn't hesitate to apply it to Jesus.

They called Jesus Ho Curios. And to call Jesus Ho Curios is tantamount to saying that Jesus is Jehovah. He is Yahweh.

He is God. Indeed when you come to that great passage in Philippians chapter 2, verses 9 and 11, that God highly exalted him, gave him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Ho Curios, the Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Now there are three wonderful things in those three verses.

The first we've already dealt with, a, that Paul gave Jesus a God title. He called him Ho Curios. But he not only gave him a God title, he transferred to Jesus a God text from the Old Testament.

That is to say that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess, etc. Now there is a very clear allusion to Isaiah 45 verse 23 when Yahweh soliloquizes, talks to himself and says, 'To me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear by my name.' See every knee, every tongue acknowledging Yahweh. Now with this amazing allusion to Yahweh, with the amazing audacity that was given either to Paul or maybe to the authors of a song that Paul was citing, doesn't really matter which, with the amazing audacity given to them by the inspiring Spirit, they reapply Isaiah 45 verse 23 from Yahweh to Jesus.

They say that it is the will of Yahweh that every knee should bow to Jesus and every tongue should swear by his name. It's amazing, isn't it? And they go on doing it. 'Whoever calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved' in Joel chapter 2. Peter on the day of Pentecost applies it to Jesus.

So does Paul in one or two passages in his epistles like Romans 10. Whoever calls on the name of who? Yahweh or Jesus? They make no difference. They identify Yahweh with Jesus.

So Paul applies to Jesus a God title, he applies to Jesus a God text, and he demands for Jesus God worship. Every knee shall bow to him. Now bowing the knee to somebody, prostrating yourself before somebody there, is of course worship.

Now to worship Jesus, if Jesus is not God, is idolatry. That is why the crucial question to ask people is 'Do you worship Jesus?' These people who are engaged in pluralism and so on. 'Do you worship Jesus?' They may believe in their six Jesuses that Hélène introduced us to in the first session this morning, the cosmic Jesus, the Palestinian Jesus, the feminist Jesus.

Yeah, but what about the divine Jesus? Do you worship Jesus? That's the test. Some of us after the publication of the myth of God incarnate, with its seven contributors, a group of evangelical scholars invited them to meet with us for a day of conference. Four of the seven came.

And I shall always remember speaking to Don Cupid of the Sea of Faith during the lunch break. 'Don, do you ever worship Jesus?' 'Oh no,' he said immediately. Now out of his own lips we have to say, 'Then you're not a Christian if you don't worship Jesus.' Indeed he now calls himself a Christian Buddhist, as I'm

sure you know.

Now there is Jesus as Lord. Now there is nothing like this in any other religion. Early or classical Buddhism, for example, had no God at all.

Buddhism is not a theistic faith. It had no God, no worship, no religion. Divine honors were not attributed to the Buddha until about 500 years after his death, which makes it impossible to accept what Professor John Hicks says, namely that "Buddhology and Christology developed in comparable ways." That's a Hickian phrase.

But they didn't. People were calling Jesus Lord during his lifetime and certainly immediately after his death and resurrection, but they didn't call the Buddha Lord until 500 years later. There is no comparison.

So Hinduism, it is true, claims a number of so-called avatars. An avatar, literally a descent of God, of the god Vishnu, in historical people like, if they were indeed historical, like Rama and Krishna, as you can read about so-called the Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. But once again, the word incarnation is a misnomer as a translation of the word avatar, for several reasons that I could quickly give you.

The first thing is that the historicity is not only dubious, but to Hindu people unimportant. Hinduism is a collection of ethical and philosophical ideas, and Hindus are not interested in history. It doesn't matter to them if there was no historical incarnation.

Then the next thing is that these avatars in Hinduism are plural. There were a number of them, they believe. But, of course, it is of the essence of our Christian belief that God became man in Jesus of Nazareth once and for all and forever.

Another difference is that these avatars, well, they came and went. Vishnu came into Rama or Krishna and then went. But when God took humanity to himself in Jesus of Nazareth, well, who is at the right hand of God today? The man Christ Jesus, the glorified man Christ Jesus, the glorified God man.

He took human nature to himself forever when he became flesh in Jesus. So, you see, there are fundamental differences between Hindu claims and the Christian claim. Then Islam, well, of course, Islam does believe in God, Allah.

But in the Koran, Mohammed dismisses with scorn and even horror the concept of divine sonship. God forbid that Allah should ever have a son. But, of course, Mohammed never understood what was meant by the sonship of Jesus and thought that Yahweh had had sexual relations with the Virgin Mary to produce the Son of God, you know, some crude understanding.

He never understood the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ. So here is the first aspect of the uniqueness of Jesus. He's Lord.

He is God's eternal personal Word or Son made flesh, and in him the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe and the church, and our place is on our faces at his feet. He is Lord.

Now, I need, I think, to move on, secondly. I was going to talk about the claims of Jesus. I wonder whether to or not, as time is going so rapidly.

I think not, if you'll excuse me. I think if I have any time I'll come back to it at the end, if there's any time over. But I want to come on to 3b, then number 4, the proclamation of Christ, will be the second lecture after the lunch break.

But I hope to finish section 3 and give you time for questions. So 3b is Jesus is not only Lord but Saviour. He is our Lord and Saviour, and he is presented to us in the pages of the New Testament, not only in Lordship but in Saviourhood terms.

Indeed, the Divine Lord came to be the Divine Saviour. Now, we all know that the vocabulary of salvation is very unfashionable and unpopular and sometimes embarrassing even in sections of the Christian church. But we cannot possibly give it up.

We may want to win people to Christ by a gospel that doesn't use these traditional words of the traditional Christian vocabulary. We may want to present salvation in freedom terms, which I would like to do in a moment. But we cannot get away from the fact that Christianity is fundamentally a rescue religion, a religion of salvation, and that Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

Now, let me talk about salvation as freedom. Salvation is freedom from the just judgment of God. Upon our guilt, upon our sin, upon our guilt.

And it is freedom from that guilt and from a guilty conscience, freedom into a new relationship with God, in which we become his forgiven children and call him Father. Now in every aspect of freedom that I'm going to develop, you'll notice it's both negative and positive. If you look up the English dictionaries, you'll find they all define freedom negatively.

Freedom from oppression, freedom from constriction, from this and that. But what witnesses to the meaning of salvation is that you cannot understand it in only negative terms. You have to go on to the positive counterpart, not only what we're saved from, but what we're saved for, or what we're saved into.

So the first is from the judgment of God, from guilt and a guilty conscience, into sonship and daughterhood, being a child of God and addressing him as Father. Next, salvation is freedom from the bondage of meaninglessness into God's new society of love and meaning. Again it is freedom, salvation is freedom from the — I talked about meaninglessness — from the horror, the futility of pain, death, and decay into a new world of immortality, beauty, and unimaginable joy.

Indeed, I like to keep those three things together. Salvation is an experience of a new beginning through forgiveness and so on. It's an entry into a new community of love, and one day it will be entry into a new world, the new heaven and the new earth.

And all that is part of the gospel, the gospel of salvation through Christ. It was to secure this that he came, he died, and he rose again. When he died, we believe that he bore our sin and guilt in his own innocent person, that he so identified himself with us guilty sinners under the judgment of God that he bore our judgment in his own innocent person.

He took our place, bore our sin, died our death, took our place. Now that is a substitutionary atonement. It is incredibly unpopular amongst many theologians today who get all hot and bothered and emotional about it for some reason, maybe because it has been misstated by us.

But the idea that God himself should come in the person of his incarnate Son and identify himself with sinful and guilty humanity in order to bear in his innocent person the judgment we deserve is the most marvelous news in the whole world. How people can become upset with it instead of overawed by it beats me. And we need to be faithful to it.

This is the essence of the gospel, of the good news of the New Testament. Not only then did he die, but God raised him from the dead in order to bear witness to the satisfactoriness of what he had done. And that resurrection is a supernatural event so that in raising him God changed him, so that his body became new, glorious, and translucent.

And that was the beginning of God's new creation. And one of the reasons we have to insist on the bodily nature of the resurrection is that the resurrection body of Jesus is the first bit of the material universe to be redeemed and glorified. And all the rest of the material universe, including our own bodies, is going to share in that transformation and glorification that his resurrection body that still exists in heaven today is the first bit of the material order to have been redeemed.

It's a marvelous truth. So through the death and resurrection of Jesus we are offered the new beginning, the new community, and the new world. But there is nothing like this in any other religion.

It is also unique. It's not only in his incarnation that his uniqueness is seen, but in his atonement and resurrection as well. Indeed the whole concept of a gracious God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, indeed that he came after us himself in the person of his only begotten son, and pursued us to the desolate agony of the cross, all that has no parallel in other religions.

The divine initiative of grace. Buddhism sees man's predicament in suffering rather than in sin. Philosophical Hinduism sees it in Maya, that is the illusion of our space-time experience.

Popular Hinduism on the other hand sees our problem in karma, this terrible doctrine of karma, meaning retribution in reincarnation, that every human being has to be reincarnated over and over and over again in samsara, the endless cycle of reincarnation, in order to eat the fruit of our own wrong-doing in previous incarnations. And there is no escape from it except nirvana, which is extinction in the end. It's a most dismal and dreadful doctrine, karma.

And we want to say that Jesus has broken into it, into samsara, and offers us forgiveness, and that we shall never lose our own individuality. There's a fundamental difference between Christian mysticism and Hindu mysticism. Islam, I come to next, Islam does proclaim the compassion and the mercy of Allah.

Every surah, every paragraph in the Quran, as you no doubt know, begins in the name of Allah, the compassionate and the merciful. But when you read the Quran carefully and you ask yourself, to whom is Allah merciful and compassionate, the answer is, he's merciful to the meritorious. If you fast in Ramadan, if you pay your tax of alms and charity, if you say the requisite statutory prayers each day, in other words, if you do your good works, then Allah will be merciful to you.

But the Quran has no message of mercy for the undeserving. But the essence of grace, what is grace? Grace is mercy to the undeserving. Grace is God's loving kindness to those who deserve nothing at his hand except judgment.

Now it's interesting that in Judaism too it is recognized that this was unique. C.G. Montefiore, who remained a Jewish scholar all his life and contributed to that great volume called *The Beginnings of*

Christianity and wrote, I think, a four-volume work on the synoptic Gospels, magnificently open and honest. When he was asked, what is there in the teaching of Jesus that is unique and not found in Judaism, this was his reply.

I want to give you the exact words. I should be far from attempting to deny the original elements in the Gospel teaching. He said, the summons not to wait till sinners meet you in your sheltered and orderly path, that is that the rabbis wouldn't wait until sinners meet you, but to go forth and seek out and redeem the sinner and the fallen.

The passion to heal and to bring back to God the wretched and the outcast, this I do not find in rabbinism. This form of love seems lacking. So you see, the rabbis believed that a sheep could bleat its way home and be accepted if it did.

But Jesus was the good shepherd who went out into the wilderness to seek and to serve the lost, and that is unique. Bishop Stephen Neal wrote, the good shepherd goes out into the wilderness to seek the lost sheep. God in Christ takes the initiative to go out to seek and to serve the lost with no grudging calculation of the cost to himself.

Now listen, this is Stephen Neal. If any other religion has anything in the least like the doctrines of incarnation and atonement, I have yet to find it. There is nothing like this at all.

Now I must finish. Thirdly, and just keep I think within the hour, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Saviour, Jesus is ours. Not only the Lord and Saviour, but our Lord and Saviour.

This personal possessive language of the Bible, Old and New Testament, is very meaningful. In the Old Testament, the Lord is my shepherd, O Lord my rock and my redeemer, the Lord is my light and my salvation in many psalms. And in the New Testament, what is claimed is a personal relationship to Jesus Christ himself.

For example, Peter writes, although you've never seen him, you love him. You love him. He's so real to you, he can be the object of your love.

Though you've never seen him, you love him and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Here is Paul, I count everything loss in comparison with the overwhelming gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I've suffered the loss of everything and counted rubbish, that I may win Christ and be found in him. See, the New Testament is full of this sort of language of the personal knowledge of Christ.

Once again, there is nothing like it in other religions. The Buddhist never claims to know the Buddha. The Muslim doesn't claim to know Mohammed.

The Marxist certainly doesn't claim to know Marx, and the Confucianist doesn't claim to know Confucius. They look back to the founder of their religion as a historical person and a teacher of remote antiquity. Yeah, we look back to Jesus, the historical teacher too, but Christ is also our contemporary.

And by the Holy Spirit, we know him. He enters into our personality. He changes us from within.

It's wonderful. And that is unique also. Maybe one quotation and I stop.

The relation of Jesus Christ to Christianity, one author writes, differs entirely from that of all other founders towards the religions and philosophers that bear their names. Platonism, for example, is a method of

philosophic thought derived from Plato. Islam is the belief in the revelation by Saif the Mohammed.

Buddhism is following the principles enunciated by Buddha. But Christianity is in essence adherence to the person of Jesus Christ, not his teaching, though that comes in. So here are three major aspects of the uniqueness of Jesus.

He's Lord, he is Savior, and he is ours. He is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And those are three historical events, his birth, his death, and resurrection and ascension, for there are three theological truths, his incarnation, his atonement, and his exaltation.

God keep us true, though I hope his gentleness, which is what I'm coming to after lunch. God keep us true to this unique revelation and action of God in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We'll pray for a moment.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/B1sattbSViU.mp4>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-stott/the-unique-jesus/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net