**Monotheism: We Believe In One God**

Sunday March 5, 2023

Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 14:12-14; Joshua 24:2; Genesis 32:28; 1Corinthians 10:21; Colossians 2:9 (NIV)

**SLIDE 1** (Right after I greet those online and as I give preliminary remarks)

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NIV)**

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

**SLIDE 2** (Right after prayer and until I read the sermon in a sentence)

**Sermon in a Sentence:** **As the Church we believe in only one God and commit exclusively to Him.**

**Introduction**

* How many of you have heard the words, “My truth”? It’s been used by influencers like Oprah for years. We live in an age of relativism, which is “the doctrine that…truth…exists in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and **is not absolute**.”[[1]](#footnote-1) And I’ve talked with a number of people who are having a challenge dealing with a response to the eternal destiny of their good friends in the community who don’t believe like we do. As this relates to who God is, we need to straighten it out because it is fundamental to our witness.
* Last month I spoke about Love Culture. You may recall that the message was centred around verse 5 of today’s reading. I ask you to humour me and not think that this is repetition. Rather, in this season of sermons I am building the case for unity in the church as the only way to accomplish what God asks of our generation.
* So, today I am going to talk about monotheism, or the belief in one God. This idea can get complicated quickly. My goal is to keep it as simple as possible and in line with biblical revelation, while giving you a few external references in case you want to research more.
* Genesis, the book of beginnings, opens with these words in 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The word “heavens”[[2]](#footnote-2) describes the universe where the stars and sky are. But it also refers to the abode of God. So, God created everything that exists.
* Additional scriptures[[3]](#footnote-3) in the Bible give some insight into what went wrong after God began to create. Lucifer was one of His brilliant angelic creations until he decided that he wanted to be equal to God. He wanted worship from fellow heavenly beings that was reserved for God alone. Creation is single source – worship is singular in focus. So, God expelled Lucifer from His Presence.
* Lucifer, now Satan, in due time deceived the first humans that God created in His image and likeness. He persuaded them to seek independence from the Creator by disobeying Him in pursuit of their desire to be, “like Him, knowing good from evil”. There’s a striking similarity between the reason for the fall of Satan and for the fall of humanity. The creature wanted to be equal to the Creator. **That’s the link that connects Lucifer’s fall with Adam and Eve’s.**
* As the Creator and Sustainer of everything that exists, God knows what’s best for His creation. From Adam to Abraham, Satan had humanity worshipping all sorts of created things rather than the one true, self-existent God. This sometimes included worshipping the Devil himself. But even indirectly, he had people worshipping what he wanted, like idols and planets, and not what God wanted.
* With Abraham we see God’s redemption plan for humanity kicking into gear. It’s about restoring the original relationship God had with humanity, where the Creator keeps us – as only He can – and we the creatures worship Him alone – which is fitting. And God’s construct for bringing people back to Himself is the Church. So, let’s go there.

**SLIDE 3**

1. **God draws people to Himself through the Church**

* In Genesis 12:1-3 The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

By this point in human history, people inhabited extensive parts of the earth. Their worship had in common the idea that there was a higher power than humanity. But beliefs varied widely as to who that power was. In fact, many believed that there were competing powers in the same way that the earth had competing kingdoms.

Into this diverse context God came and chose Abram. Joshua tells us in 24:2 that Abram came out of a culture of idol worship. And God explained that He would draw people back to Himself through Abram and his seed.

* Fast forward a few hundred years and we read that God said, “Hear O Israel”. God chose one of Abraham’s grand children Jacob, and changed his name to Israel implying the following meaning, as Bro Chris reminded us last week, “because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome”. (Genesis 32:28) Of all Abraham’s children, God chose to draw people back to Himself through Israel and his seed. And so the nation of Israel was birthed and through it came Jesus who was to save His people from their sins.
* Moving forward with God’s plan, let’s remember that He wanted to bring everyone back into a relationship with Him rather than the false gods that Satan had perpetrated. So, Paul took up the mantle to spread the message of salvation and said in Galatians 3:7-9, “Understand, then, that those who have faith are children (or the seed) of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” You can see that God now draws people to Himself through the Church.

God didn’t love Abraham, or Jacob, or the nation of Israel, or the Church any more than He loves the whole world. They weren’t intrinsically any better than the rest. He simply chose them for His purpose, to draw all people back to Him.

**Illustration**: I read a book written by one of our members. He wrote about his struggle to fund himself through high school in the country he came from. His stepmother offered to bring him to Canada and after a long wait she eventually came through. This brother did the last part of his high school education in Canada. You could feel his almost disbelief coming through the page as he talked about his shock that all the education that was being offered was “free”. But it’s only “free” for those who are here legally. He had to enter the country through a legal port of entry if he was to have access to the rights and privileges afforded to Canadians. Even those who enter at birth must be registered through legal means if they are to have access. Now, there are vast tracts of our borders that are unmonitored. Illegal immigrants can and do enter by land, sea or even air. But to get access to the rights and privileges afforded to Canadians, at some point they’ll have to go through a legal port of entry.

**Application**: The Church is like the port of entry to a relationship with God. We can’t control the paths to spirituality that people choose, but when they come to us we need to have it right. We need to accurately represent the God who appointed us as ports of entry into relationship with Him. Here are some biblical examples that show this. Jesus met Paul but sent him to the Church for access to Himself. The Ethiopian eunuch had the scriptures but the Spirit sent Phillip to give him access to Himself. What we believe and do may seem routine, but like the parable in Matthew 22 shows us, we need to get it right. The king gave a feast for everyone to attend but when he found a guest who wasn’t wearing wedding clothes, he rejected that guest. God directs people to us so that we can help them to put on garments of righteousness, not to come into the kingdom wearing the same old clothes, so to speak.

**Transition**: So, God draws people to Himself through the Church. In a sense He relies on us to reach people. That’s why we can’t afford to compromise on what we believe. We must be true to God and His call.

**SLIDE 4**

1. **The Church is monotheistic: we believe in only one God**

* The theologian Paul House writes that, “All of Israel’s faith and actions rise or fall on this conviction that there is only one God, whose name is Yahweh.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Remember that God called Abram out of a **polytheistic** culture, or **one that accepted the worship of more than one god**. The nation of Israel was formed in Egypt, a thoroughly polytheistic culture. Yet even in Egypt there were beliefs that pointed back to a common heritage for humanity. In fact, most cultures still have legends of events such as a great flood,[[5]](#footnote-5) and a major conflict that occurred in the spirit world. That’s simply because we all share a common origin. Yet Yahweh, the great “I AM” who spoke to Moses from a burning bush, overcame the gods of the mighty Egypt and demonstrated His authority as He forced Pharaoh to release Israel so that they could worship Him.
* The chosen one, Israel, was to take serious note of this central truth: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

The words “Lord and God” refer to the proper name “Yahweh”[[6]](#footnote-6) of the one true God. Those who were chosen as vessels for the salvation of humanity had to have full conviction that the one who had chosen them was the single Creator and Sustainer to everything that is. He had and has total authority. Nothing was conferred upon Him as we do to presidents, prime ministers and royalty. There is none beside Him to challenge or share His glory as Lucifer quickly discovered. Sole ultimate authority resides in “The Lord our God”, the then God of Israel, and the now God of the Church.

* This central truth is vital: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Satan had succeeded in diverting human attention from this truth. That’s why Adam and Eve thought that there could be a competing power apart from God. That’s why nations were worshipping alternate gods. But it was all false because the only way there could be an alternative power is if there was more than one uncreated authority. Plurality presents the option of a power struggle. But singularity eliminates that option by definition. That’s why the idea that God is one is so critical. If there was more than one, we might ultimately have to choose who’s the ultimate authority. But there’s no choice, because the Lord is one.

**Illustration**: In any context, if you have the ear of the one in charge you’ll prosper. On more than one occasion during my career, the President’s kid came to do an assignment at the company. The President dictated that the kid was to be treated just like everyone else. Everyone else nodded and treated the kid like the President was his father.

**Application**: In Canada we’re democratic and have freedom of religion. I agree with it not because I think democracy is perfect but because I believe in every person’s god-given gift to be able to choose or reject Him. People worship many gods today even though we think we’re modern and the ancient world was superstitious. We’re expected to not only tolerate other worldviews, but to celebrate them. In this climate we must learn how to respect different points of view while remaining true, and without celebrating what we know to be wrong. We as the Church must understand that we have the ear of the Father. There really is none beside Him and He shares His glory with no one.

**Transition**: So, the Church is monotheistic: we believe in only one God. Yet everyone still has a choice to serve Him or not to serve Him.

**SLIDE 5**

1. **As the Church we commit exclusively to one God**

* Since we already talked about love culture I’ll be brief with this part of the text. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” We’ve got to be “all in”. If we are going to be the Abraham of our families, the Israel of our nations, the Church of our generation, halfway won’t cut it. Average never produces excellence. God wants all of us.
* 1 Corinthians 10:21 tells us, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” The whole call of Abraham, establishment of Israel, and death of Jesus was to make clear the foundation of the Creator’s most important message to humanity: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one”. Christ’s gospel stands on this.
* “Why is that such a big deal?” you may ask. It’s because restoring your relationship with God was important enough for Him to die for. This whole thing is about Satan duping humanity into losing our relationship with God. We’ve all sinned and God cannot relate to sin, which means we were destined to an eternity apart from God. So, He resolved the issue with His own blood in Jesus and reversed the curse that Satan caused to fall upon humanity. But we have a part to play. We must acknowledge for ourselves that we are sinners, turn away from our sins, and accept the lordship of Jesus in our lives. Then we can enter the Kingdom of God for now and eternity.

**Illustration**: I’m going to read from a Christian Post article dated Monday July 25, 2022. That I quote this person doesn’t mean I endorse everything about him. I simply want to hightlight the point that there are influential voices calling for full commitment, even in the world. “In a ‘Message to the Christian Churches,’ world-renowned Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson warned that young people, especially men, are **facing an unparalleled demoralization due to the West’s weaponized guilt**, and, therefore, the Church should leave aside social justice and other modern obsessions and **save souls before ‘it’s too late.’** “It is, of course, completely presumptuous of me to dare to write and broadcast a video entitled ‘Message to the Christian Churches,’” Peterson said at the beginning of his video posted on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7ytLpO7mj0&t=30s). “But I’m going to do it anyway, because I have something to say and because that something needs to be said.”

**Application**: **So, what should you do now? What’s the call to action?** I’m calling our Church to full commitment to God and His mission in our generation. People aren’t coming to us to find the world. In many cases they already have that. People come to the Church to find God. We commit to sharing the God of the Bible, and no other god. We commit to teaching people to follow what God says through the Bible, and no other spiritually inspired holy texts. We commit to respecting the dignity of every person even if we disagree with them, because they are made in the image of God. We are monotheists, not polytheists.

**Transition**: As the Church we commit exclusively to one God. Anything less would detract from our value to the world.

**SLIDE 6**

**Conclusion**

* Next week we are going to talk about unity. Today’s message is a bedrock to that. As the Church we believe in only one God and commit exclusively to Him. More than one source would be grounds for division. But we’ve seen that the Bible says…
* 4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
* Whatever confusion you may have on this subject of monotheism, know that believing in one God is central to our faith. Especially ministering in the pluralistic society we live in, this must be clear if we are to be salt and light.
* But that’s not enough. There are monotheists in our society who are not a part of the Church. So, when they ask who this one God is, it isn’t correct to say that He is whoever they deem the ultimate power to be. Paul gives us our response in Colossians 2:9. God has revealed Himself to humanity in Jesus in whom the fullness of the godhead dwelt bodily. That’s why Jesus said in John 8:58, “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I AM!”
* If you haven’t given your life to Jesus yet, now is the time. Come up and we’ll pray with you.
* And if you know that you need your faith strengthened in this intellectually confusing Age, this is the place. Come up and we’ll pray for you.

1. Oxford Dictionary Online, adjusted [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Genesis 1:1 Interlinear Bible explanation for the word “heavens” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, 2Peter 2:4, Jude 1:6, Revelation 12, [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. House, Paul R, “Old Testament Theology”, page 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Look up the “Enuma Elish”, an ancient Babylonian scriptural text, for example [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Interlinear Bible [↑](#footnote-ref-6)