

**No Doubt About It**  
*Just One Way*  
**July 4, 2021**

Never had he been more popular. Everywhere he went, multitudes followed him, hanging on his every word ...

... because never had there been such a unique personality in the public eye ...

- One who had the wisdom to address the everyday concerns of people with relevance and humor and authority ...
- One who had the charisma to ignite

a crowd and challenge and motivate them to live life to the fullest.

Rumors abounded that, behind the scenes, he was in the process of constructing the political machinery that would soon overthrow the oppressive regime that had been in power for so long.

Those rumors eventually proved to be far from the truth.

But, at the time, they served to add to the interest and excitement over his extraordinary leadership potential.

And it was at this pinnacle of fame and

celebrity status ...

... which had been heightened even *further* by an astounding miracle in which he provided a meal for thousands of men, women and children from only a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish ...

It was at this pivotal moment in his ministry that Jesus gathered the many disciples who were following him ...

**... and said to them ...**

*"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

He continued:

*Whoever eats my flesh  
and drinks my blood has  
eternal life, and I will raise  
him up at the last day. For  
my flesh is real food and  
my blood is real drink.  
John 6:53-55 (NIV)*

Now, to you and me, the language seems odd and strange, but to those who heard it that day, it was quite clear.

Jesus was clarifying his true mission.

He was saying, "yes, I can teach you how to live your best life now. And I can even do miracles like providing food from Heaven in a pinch. And I could

even raise an army to overthrow the Romans.”

“But those are not what I’m here for.”

“What I’m here for is to bring a new kind of life that begins today and lasts into eternity.”

“And I will accomplish that by giving my flesh and blood as sacrifice for the sins of the world” (referring to the cross on which he would eventually die).

“And unless you eat and drink of me and what I’m going to do; unless you receive me and what I’m going to do, you cannot have that life.”

One of Jesus' best friends, John – the Apostle John – who saw this scene take place ...

**... wrote that ...**

*On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" John 6:60 (NIV)*

"I mean, it's one thing for Him to give us some advice on how to live better lives. And if He wants to rid us of the Romans, that's certainly OK, too."

"But to claim that He's the *exclusive* source of spiritual life and that we are dead without fully embracing Him,

believing in Him, following Him – that's another thing altogether!"

### **John writes:**

*Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"*  
*John 6:61 (NIV)*

Apparently, it did because a few verses later ...

### **We read that ...**

*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*  
*John 6:66 (NIV)*

Fast-forward in your mind to the year 2021.

Sam and Shelly Smith, who are in their early 30s, are facing a mini-crisis.

- Their marriage is less than fulfilling.
- They have two kids, but the parenting thing isn't going so well.
- Sam's mother is facing a life-threatening battle with cancer.

For the first time in their lives, both Sam and Shelly are sensing a real void – a thirst for something more. And they are seeking answers.



Lucky for them, it just so happens that a co-worker in Shelly's office takes a risk and invites her and Sam to come check out her church sometime.

They aren't really the church-going type, but she and Sam decide to give it a try ...

... which is how one Sunday morning they find themselves in the converted gymnasium of a remodeled psychiatric hospital!

Imagine that.

And they're shocked because it's the complete opposite of everything they believed church to be.

- It's interesting.
- It's fun.
- The people are friendly and most of them seem "normal." (most of them).
- The music is great.
- And the things the speakers talk about actually make a difference in real life.

And so, over time – and much to their surprise – Sam and Shelly become regulars.

They begin applying what they learn

and to their amazement, things begin changing for the better.

They don't understand everything about God and Jesus and church and the Bible and how it all fits together, but they're catching on.

However, one Sunday they hear something that throws a huge stumbling block into the path of their spiritual journey.

In his message, the pastor quotes a verse from the Bible ...

**... where Jesus says ...**

*"I am the way, the truth,*

*and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 (NIV)*

... and a verse where one of Jesus' friends ...

### **Peter says ...**

*"There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12 (NLT)*

... and a verse where ...

### **John says ...**

*"Whoever does not believe*

*stands condemned  
already because they  
have not believed in the  
name of God's one and  
only Son." John 3:18  
(NIV)*

... and another verse where ...

## **Jesus says ...**

*"Unless you believe that I  
am who I claim to be, you  
will die in your sins." John  
8:24 (NLT)*

Not surprisingly, Sam and Shelly are more than a little uncomfortable with what they're hearing.

And as they drive home from church that

day, their conversation sounds a lot like that of those grumbling and offended first-century followers of Jesus.

“Jesus certainly has a lot of good ideas about how to live life,” Sam says, “but this claim that He and the Christian faith is *the* one and only way to God ... this is a hard teaching.”

“And I’m not sure I can go for that. I’m not sure I can accept it.”

And Shelly nods her head in agreement.

## **“Axioms”**

Now, obviously, Sam and Shelly aren’t real, but *the experience is* ...

... because the ex-clu-sivity claimed by Jesus and his followers is a hard teaching to accept *for many people* – including some of the people who are sitting in this room or watching online today.

And I get it.

I understand why a thinking, rational person would have trouble with it. I can see why spiritual skeptics and even serious Christians would have doubts.

... which is why nothing of what I am going to say in this message is meant to be critical of anyone who does doubt.

**That said ... a big part of why we struggle with this idea has to do with what you and I have been led to believe about the nature of spiritual truth.**

You and I have been led to believe in four underlying – and typically unstated – assumptions concerning the diversity of spiritual expression that exists in our world and how we should think about it.

And so, before we throw out this uncomfortable claim of Jesus and Christianity, I think it would be wise to take a look at those assumptions – axioms, even, because they are never challenged – and do just that: *challenge them*.



After all, one of the things we've learned in this series is that we should question our doubts as much as we question our faith.

So let me give you these four axioms up front and then we'll take a look at each one.

**Axiom #1. All major religions are basically saying the same thing. They teach the same ideas, just in different ways.**

In other words, Jesus says "to-may-toe" the Buddha says "to-mah-toe" but it's still a fruit ...

... which is why it's silly to believe Jesus is the only way.

**Axiom #2. Religious beliefs are too culturally and historically conditioned to be considered “absolute truth” – true for everyone, everywhere at all times.**

What Jesus said in a first century Palestinian culture probably made sense for them, but it isn't the same in other places and times.

So again, the claim is non-sensical.

**Axiom #3. Each religion sees only part of the truth. Everybody has a little piece of it, but nobody has the whole.**

And to claim that your religion does is just arrogant and maybe even

dangerous ...

... because, after all ...

#### **#4. Religious exclusivity typically leads to hatred and eventually violence.**

People who believe that *their* way is the only *right* way are called fundamentalists.

And history shows that one of the greatest dangers to peace is fundamentalism ... so don't be that guy or gal.

So, there are the four axioms. No surprise there, right?

At some point in your life, you've heard and thought and maybe even been taught these ideas.

Ok, now let's examine them one-by-one.

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**First of all, is it true that all major religions basically teach the same thing just in different ways?**

That's very easy to answer in just a very quick survey of major doctrines.

For example, when it comes to the existence of a personal God, i.e. a God who is out there somewhere who is a person, who knows you and you can know and relate to ...

- Buddhists say “no” there is no such thing.
- Hindus say “sort of” – they believe that God is an abstract force that can occasionally take the form of a human or even an animal.
- Christianity and Judaism says “yes” – God is a personal being who created human beings in His own image, and He loves us and wants to have a relationship with us.

It's obvious that those are clearly not the same.

Concerning salvation ... beyond the fact

that major religions define that term very differently ...

- Buddhists say salvation (whatever it means) comes by self-effort alone – because there is no personal god out there to help or guide you.
- Hindus say it comes through devotion, good works and self-control.
- Muslims believe you earn your salvation by paying for your sins one way or another.
- Christians say the exact opposite of all of those: you can't earn salvation; you can't do it on your

own, which is why you need Jesus of Nazareth, who is God in the flesh, who died for our sins.

You receive salvation as a gift by believing in what He has done instead of what you yourself can do.

Again, clearly not the same set of beliefs.

And, speaking of Jesus ...

- Christians, as I just said, believe he was God in the flesh.
- Buddhists believe Jesus was a good teacher, but less important than the Buddha.

- Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet on the level of Adam, Noah or Abraham but, of course, less important than Muhammad.

Not the same thing.

In fact, in his book, *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller describes an occasion when he had an opportunity to participate in an interfaith panel discussion in which all of the participants (representing each of these major world religions) were able to agree on just one statement concerning the person of Jesus:

**And here's the statement that they came up with.**



“If Christians are right about Jesus being God, then Muslims and Jews fail in a serious way to love God as God really is.

### **But ...**

“If Muslims and Jews are right (and Jesus is not God but rather a teacher or prophet), then *Christians* fail in a serious way to love God as God really is.”

That’s the agreement between the major religions concerning Jesus.

The bottom line, Keller wrote, was that it was clear that “we couldn’t all be equally right about the nature of God.”<sup>i</sup>

Somebody must be wrong.

So, realistically, the most you can say about "all religions" is that they agree that ...

- There is more to this life than meets the eye.
- And something is "out there" or "in here" and we ought to discern it and try to respond to it in some way.

Therefore ... to collapse all of the various doctrines and say that all religions are kind of saying the same thing but with different words ...

**... is to be intellectually dense or**

## **dishonest ...**

... unless ... unless ... somehow *you*, above all others, have actually figured out how they all fit together in spite of their stark divergences.

And to claim *that* ... to claim that somehow “all religions actually reconcile in their beliefs” ...

**... is to claim a level of personal enlightenment that none of those religions even claim for themselves.**

Do you see that?

If someone says this – that “all religions actually reconcile in their beliefs” – it

means that they are holding a specific view of God and spiritual reality ...

... which they believe to be *superior* to the beliefs of most of the major religions and the billions of people in the world who adhere to one of those religions.

I don't know about you, but I can't go for that.

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Ok, what about the second axiom?

**That all religious beliefs are culturally and historically conditioned and therefore can't be trusted to reveal absolute truth for all people everywhere.**

In other words, the only reason you believe what you believe about God is because that's what your parents told you, or your Westernized culture told you.

Your beliefs – especially the religious ones – are a product of your local culture at your point in time and therefore can't be true for all people everywhere.

Now, this sounds really impressive when you first hear it because it takes into account the overwhelming evidence that "belief" does appear to be socially conditioned.

However, there's a big problem with how

we typically use that evidence, which is that ...

**We freely apply it to what *religions* teach us, but we don't apply it what our *culture* teaches us!**

... which is at least dumb if not totally unfair.

Think about this.

Why isn't the belief that "because religious beliefs are historically and culturally-conditioned they are therefore untrustworthy" *also considered to be ...*

- A culturally conditioned belief ...
- And therefore untrustworthy?

In reality, people who believe that “culturally-conditioned beliefs cannot reveal absolute truth” *believe that* because that’s what their culture – *our* culture – has told them to believe.

Maybe they – we – should think twice before we “go for that” because there are many other cultures around the world which do not hold to that belief.

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Alright, let’s look at the third axiom which, again, is the idea that ...

**Each religion sees only part of the truth but no single one sees the whole thing ...**

... meaning that God revealed some of it to the Jews, some to the Buddhists, some to the Muslims, etc, etc.

**Or, as one bumper sticker puts it,  
“My God is too big for any one  
religion.”**

Sometimes this idea is explained using the “elephant analogy” which goes like this:

- Four blind men come across a large animal.
- First guy touches its side and says, “I think this creature is like a wall.”
- Second guy finds its leg and says,



“No, I think it’s more like a tree.”

- The third guy touches its tail and says, “You’re both wrong – this animal is more like a rope.”
- And the fourth guy, who is holding the elephant’s trunk says, “All of you are wrong – this thing is more like a huge cane.”

Are any of them wrong? No.

But none of them are totally right, either. Each of them has a different perspective on the same animal, but it’s only part of the animal.

“It’s similar with all these religions,” the

axiom holds. "They each have a different perspective on God, just not the total perspective."

And it sounds logical and sensible ... until you really think about it.

And once you do, you'll notice something that's not obvious when you first hear the story ... which is that ...

**The person *telling* the story is claiming to be the only one who can truly see!**

He or she supposedly has the singular ability to see both the elephant *and* the guys examining it (who, by the way, just happen to be blind).

And he or also she has the vantage point to know that each of them is aware of just one part of the elephant.

Now, what this means is that whenever someone applies this analogy to a specific religious belief or claims (like “Jesus is the only way”) ...

- They are putting themselves in the position of the omniscient viewer ...
- And that *they* and not the religions (with their thousands of years of history) have the superior vision and knowledge.

**Therefore, for someone to claim that “no religion can see the whole truth” is to claim that, somehow,**

***they can.***

Somehow, again, *they* are more enlightened than anyone else.

Somehow, *their belief* that all the world religions are not seeing the whole picture trumps the convictions of all those religions.

I don't know about you, but I can't go for that because, frankly, it seems foolish and arrogant.

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Speaking of arrogance ... let's look at the final axiom which is that ...

## **Religious exclusivity typically leads to hatred and eventually violence.**

And for this reason, while the idea that Christianity is “the only way” might actually be *right* and intellectually defensible, it’s not *good*.

It’s dangerous and destructive. And we ought to get rid of it along with all forms of fundamentalist religion.

Now, again, on the surface this is an idea that sounds good in theory.

However, the problem is that, in the past century, there were several massive efforts to do just that.

Think of Soviet Russia, Communist China, the Khmer Rouge and even Nazi Germany. All of those regimes made it a stated goal to “get rid of religion.”

And they did.

But what was the result? It wasn't more tolerance. It wasn't more peace.

Instead, it was more *intolerance* and more *violence* and more *bloodshed* than ever before.

See the problem is not religion or even fundamentalism per se.

In fact, if you think about it, every single one of us – whether we're Christians or

atheists – hold to some kind of unprovable faith (or non-faith) commitments that we think are superior to those of others.

That's why we hold to them!

**... which means that, at some level, we're *all* fundamentalists.**

And so, the *real* question isn't whether fundamentalism is good or bad.

**The real question is ...**

"Which fundamentals will lead their adherents to be the most loving towards those with whom they differ?"

Which set of unavoidably exclusive

beliefs will lead us to humble, peace-loving behavior?"<sup>ii</sup>

And this is where Christianity has a real answer because, at the very heart of the Christian view of reality is a man who ...

- Loved
- Served
- Taught
- Welcomed
- Challenged
- Believed in
- And then *died*, not just for his friends, but for his enemies, praying for their forgiveness as he did.

Point being that *the most fundamental* of Christian beliefs actually has the power



to be a force for peace and for great good in this world.<sup>iii</sup>

And therefore, to claim that Christianity should be dismissed simply because of its exclusivity is, again, foolish.

And I can't go for that. And I don't think you should either.

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Now, again, my point in all of this isn't to prove anything about Christianity; specifically, that Jesus' claim to being "the only way" is right.

My point is to say that what you and I have been led to believe about the

nature of spiritual truth just doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

**And therefore, it is not unreasonable – logically speaking – to believe that one religion could be “right” while all the others are wrong.**

... which is not the same as saying they are bad or that they don't add value to the world in some way.

It just means that it's reasonable to conclude based on evidence (which we've talked about all throughout this series) that Jesus was correct when he said, “unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you.”

And therefore, *everyone everywhere* ought to believe in Him and follow Him.

After all (as we say all the time around here) ... if a guy can predict his own death and resurrection and then pull it off, we probably ought to trust what He's telling us.

## **A Hard Teaching**

Of course, the assertion that "Jesus really *is* the way and, therefore, everyone everywhere ought to believe in Him and follow Him" still is a very hard teaching ...

... because, obviously, there are so many people in the world who do *not*

believe in Jesus – and for good reasons.

- Some were “born in the jungle” (so to speak) and never heard about him.
- Some grew up in cultures that taught them to believe in some other god or no god.
- And then there are babies who die before they’re old enough to believe in anything.

Are all of these people condemned to hell? Is that what Jesus was saying?

I’ll be honest, friends ...

- Questions like that make it hard to *be happy* that Jesus is the only way.
- Questions like that make me wonder about the fairness of it all. I mean, the majority of the world's population has never heard of Jesus and never will!

And if God is not fair (and this may sound like blasphemy) who wants to have anything to do with Him?

Of course, maybe – just maybe – you and I are not very good judges of what is really fair.

Maybe our perspective is a little bit off. Maybe we have some misconceptions

about people and sin and God that color our judgment.

For instance ... the reason it bothers me that God condemns those who never heard the message of Christ is that ...

**I want to believe that people would accept Christ if they just knew about him.**

But that that's an overly optimistic misconception on my part because the truth is that ...

**Most people who have heard about Jesus reject Him.**

I mean, here we are in a country where the Gospel message of "you are a

sinner, he is the savior, put your faith in His work on the cross instead of your own efforts and be saved" is freely proclaimed.

And yet, what happens?

Most people reject it. People sit in this auditorium every Sunday and reject it!

So, why am I so convinced that "someone somewhere in the world" would believe if they only heard?

Could it be that God already knows how some people would respond and that's why they don't get to hear?

I mean, aren't there people in your life

that you don't tell things to because you know ahead of time that they won't listen anyway?

Seems to me that an all-knowing God ought to be able to make that kind of call. And for Him to do so, really is not unfair.

I'll admit that it's harder than I'm comfortable with, but it's not unfair.

Of course, that's also a little speculative on my part, so, let me try to clarify what Christianity teaches about those who *for whatever reason* don't believe.

**1. First and foremost, as I've mentioned (and Jesus himself said), there is no salvation outside**



## **of Jesus.**

- No one can come to the Father except through the Son.
- Sinners are made right with God only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They – we – cannot do it on our own.

That's the basic message.

However, from the scriptures we do know that ...

**2. There are some cases of people who do not know Jesus in a personal or conscious way who are “saved.”**

For example, in the Old Testament it says that ...

*Abram believed the Lord,  
and the Lord declared him  
righteous because of his  
faith. Genesis 15:6 (NLT)*

And centuries later, the great Christian missionary Paul in one of his letters affirms that this man Abram has received salvation, is with God now and will participate the future Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>iv</sup>

But Abram obviously lived *before* Jesus. He never heard of Him.

How can this be if everyone who is saved must go through Jesus?

**The only solution is that Jesus' sacrificial death somehow embraces more than those who consciously embrace it themselves.**

Somehow, God must apply to them the cleansing that comes from the atonement of a Savior that they, for reasons outside of their control, did not know of.

I think this explains what happens to some people:

- Small children who die ...
- People who are mentally incapacitated ...

- And others who are prevented from knowing about Jesus through no fault of their own.

I trust that the goodness and graciousness of God *demonstrated in Jesus* works on behalf of these folks.

But, with that said – that there are some cases of people who do not know Jesus in a personal or conscious way who are “saved ...

... it also needs to be said that ...

### **3. It's very clear that those who *knowingly reject Jesus* are doomed.**

There is no hope in for people who *do*

hear of Jesus and *choose* not to believe in Him.

Again, the Apostle John writes ...

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*

*John 3:36 (NIV)*

Bottom line:

- Believe in the Son and receive eternal life.
- Reject the Son and receive God's wrath – which is the right and fair punishment for sin.

Those are the only two options for people who hear the message.

And, again, I'll be honest with you: I wish I could say that something must be wrong here and that we've misunderstood what the Bible is saying, or that the Bible is just not right, or Jesus is not right.

I wish I could tell you that somehow in the end it's all going to work out and that everyone, regardless of what they did or didn't do concerning Him, will get to live forever in God's Kingdom ...

... except maybe the rapists and axe murderers and people like Adolf Hitler.

But as someone once said ...

“It is better to speak the truth that hurts and then heals than falsehood that comforts and then kills.

“It is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie. It's better to stand alone with the truth than to be wrong with a multitude.”<sup>v</sup>

So, as hard as this teaching is ... I've got to tell you the offensive truth according to Christianity:

*Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one gets to the Father unless they go*

*through Him.*

Of course, some might still ask, “but why is anyone ‘doomed’ in the first place? Why doesn’t God just accept everyone as is?”

The answer is ... and we talk about this all the time ... the problem is ... sin.

**The Hebrew prophet Isaiah once put it like this:**

*There is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.  
Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)*

Because you and I live *in* it and *with* it



constantly, you and I are numb to the severity of sin. We tend to minimize the nature of sin.

But, in reality, sin is a much bigger deal in the spiritual realm than you and I can even comprehend. Notice that Isaiah says that it's not *God* that cuts people off - it's their sin.

In fact, I suspect that on Judgment Day, we're going to be shocked at just how gross sin really is. I think we're going to see the reality of sin in a way we've never seen it before.

And I think that we're going to see that God really has no other choice than to say to those who die in it, "depart from

me.”

See, from this side of eternity we ask, “How can God *not* ‘just accept’ everyone into His Kingdom?”

On the other side I think we’re going to ask, “How *could* God accept those who have not been cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ?”

On the other side of eternity, when we really see just how repulsive our sin is, I think we’re going to be shocked that God would even want us.

**I think we’re going to realize that the real question – the right question ... isn’t “why just *one* way” but “why would God offer**

***any way at all?”***

I think we're going to clearly see in a way we've never seen before ...

... what an incredibly loving thing it was for God to take on flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and then his life on the cross to pay the penalty for sin so that we wouldn't have to.

## **The Rest of the Story**

So, what are we to do with all of this?

Well ... way back at the beginning of this message, we saw that the multitudes *were offended* at what Jesus said and they rejected Him. They were indignant

and decided to stop following Him.

But the story didn't end there.

## **John tells us that after this ...**

*Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "So, are you all going to leave, too?" John 6:67 (NIV)*

And I think this part of the story is important because it takes what we've been talking about from the category of theoretical and moves it to the personal.

I mean ...

- The Twelve had witnessed everything Jesus had done and said

just like the rest of the crowds.

- And they heard Jesus make that crazy statement about his flesh and blood being the only way to have eternal life.
- And they, too, could have become indignant like the crowd.

And the very personal question before each of them at that moment was ...

... could they look beyond the offensiveness of Jesus' claim to the greater reality that, for some reason, something spectacular – actually, *someone* spectacular – had come into their lives?

By the way, that's the same question before us today. Can we look beyond the offensiveness that ...

- There is only one way ...
- And, for some reason, not everyone gets to hear about that way.

Can we look beyond that to the great and spectacular reality that ...

- Thanks to the grace of God, there IS a way ...
- And for some reason we *have been granted the privilege* of hearing about that way.

## **Can we move beyond “why don’t others know and hear?” to “why did I get to know and hear?”**

I really don’t know the answer to that other than to say it’s yet another example of the eternal mystery God’s grace – his favor that we don’t deserve and cannot earn.

And so my hope and prayer for you is that your response will be the same as that of the Twelve.

### **Peter answered for all of them when he said ...**

*Simon Peter replied, “Lord,*

*to whom would we go?  
You alone have the words  
that give eternal life."*

*John 6:68 (NLT)*

That's probably among my top five favorite statements in the whole Bible ...

... because it says that ...

- In spite of all the things I don't understand ...
- All the things that bother me about God and Jesus and church and Christians ...
- All the things that are offensive to me because of my cultural biases ...



... Jesus really does have the words of life because Jesus is the source of life ...

... which he proved in his resurrection from the dead.

It always comes back to that: the resurrection.

... which is why, in just a minute, I'm going to ask you to stand and sing one of our favorite worship songs that highlights that idea.

But first let me pray for you.

Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, pg 4

<sup>ii</sup> Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, pg 20

<sup>iii</sup> Keller pg 20

<sup>iv</sup> Romans 4:3-8

v. Adrian Rogers, quoted in *The Berean Call*, Dec 1996, page 3.