

Set 2 - Lecture 3

(0:20 - 7:05)

Let's start out with a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you for this time when we can come together and wrestle with a very important truth, one that's often an obstacle, a stumbling block for many in the culture. We pray that you might give us light and illumination, you might come and help us, Lord.

We always desperately need your help. We are finite, we are fallen, we desperately need your spirit to help us to be able to understand. We pray that the words of my mouth, we might bless the words of my mouth in the meditations of our hearts, might be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen. One of the most prominent objections to faith in the culture is the idea that Christianity is too exclusive, or the question that will come up, is Christ the only way? I've seen listings of the most prominent objections to faith, and that comes in one or two in different polls, along with the idea that the church is full of hypocrites, and then there are other objections that come in after that, but it's certainly a very significant one. Many people, when they get into college or university, they're believers, are pushed on that particular issue.

Well, how can you say, you're brought up in a Christian nation and a Christian background, how can you say that your way is really the way for everyone? So it's a big question, and how can Christianity be so audacious as to claim to be the way to salvation, or the only way to be saved? It's a big question that many people have, and I want to look at it through the lens of C.S. Lewis, and look at some things he said about relating faith in Christ in relation to other religions, and then come down a little bit more explicitly on this issue later on in this talk. First of all, I think what C.S. Lewis underlined here, and it's important to realize that there are truths in all religions, especially religions that gain a widespread group of followers. There are usually some things that appeal or resonate as being true within that perspective.

Often a cult that's very bizarre, the more bizarre it is, it might gain a few followers, but not likely a widespread group. But any of the major religions have significant truths that are part of them, and you can sit down and look at certain things in those religious perspectives that are a basis for its appeal. And C.S. Lewis underlined this, and said, if you're a Christian, you do not have to believe that all the other religions are wrong all through.

If you're an atheist, you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the world is simply one huge mistake. So that in many ways, atheism or dogmatic atheism is more exclusive, negates all the religious perspectives, as some of the new atheists do, even more so than Christianity. But if you're a Christian, he goes on to say, you're free to think that all these religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of truth.

You realize that you live in God's world, and we have the creation that's out there in front of us, and there are many truths that people observe. And even though it may not contain all of the truth, they certainly contain pieces of the puzzle. Even though it may not show you the full picture, it contains parts of the picture that are there from the various pieces of the puzzle.

And the way that C.S. Lewis addressed it was he tried to show uniqueness of faith in Christ in comparison with other religious perspectives. And at the beginning of his book, *Problem of Pain*, he has a section that's somewhat dense when you read it for the first time, but it's actually very helpful and illuminating to help you see the ways in which Christianity is similar to other religions, but also different from it. And the way that it addresses things is in terms of four characteristics.

The numinous, the moral, the combination of the numinous and moral, and the thing that sets Christianity apart, namely the incarnation. First of all, one thing that Christianity holds in common with other religions is the numinous, but there are some religious perspectives that focus primarily on this quality. There is something, the numinous, something that's mysterious, something that's other, something that's awesome.

For instance, Rudolf Otto wrote a classic book called *The Idea of the Holy* or *Das Heilige* in German. And the idea was particularly that religions, many religions have in common what he called the *mysterium tremendum*, that which, a mystery, something that's beyond you that makes you tremble in its presence. For instance, Lewis uses an example from Kenneth Graham's book, *The Wind in the Willows*.

And in *The Wind in the Willows*, you have Rat and Mole searching for Portly, the lost otter. And they're guided to the sleeping otter by distant music. And they discover they're in the presence of Pan, the god.

And Rat, he found breath to whisper, shaking. Are you afraid? Afraid, murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. Afraid of him? Oh, never, never.

And yet, yet oh, more I am afraid. There's this ambivalence in the face of this one who is other. I know I, there was a woman I lived with in, you know, in the community there at the Ligonier Valley Study Center.

It was up in the mountains of Pennsylvania. And there was a lecture house that was at the center. And some of the houses where people stayed were out around the periphery of the property.

(7:05 - 8:44)

And that meant that after the lectures, you'd have to walk on these pathways. And it wasn't, they weren't lighted. They occasionally would have lights in the houses that, if it was really dark, like on some nights, there wasn't any moon or stars.

And it was black. And you couldn't even see your hand in front of your face. You couldn't see where you were stepping.

You had to kind of guess where you're going. But in any case, there was a woman there, part of that community, that loved horror movies. And she would go one after the other, after the other.

And she loved in some ways being scared by these horror movies. It was a major thing to her to go watch them. But on the other hand, it meant that her imagination was very active.

And so on one of these dark nights where you couldn't really see your hand in front of your face, she would have to have someone, even though she was a full-grown adult, probably in her 30s, you know, she had to have someone walk with her up to the edge. Because she would have this imagination of awful things or beings or characters coming out of the darkness to do awful things to her. On the one hand, she loved to be scared.

On the other hand, she hated to be scared. Another illustration I think of was my older son, Trey, when he was very young. Now he's almost 18.

But when he was about three years old, I used to read books to him at night. And we'd sit on the bed and I'd have several books laid out. And one of his favorite books was a classic children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*.

(8:44 - 17:10)

They made a movie out of that not too long ago. And in the beginning, this young boy is sent to, because of his disobedience, is sent to bed without his breakfast. And there's these vines and place that grows.

And he ends up getting into this boat and going to an island where the wild things are. And the wild things roar their terrible roars and show their terrible claws. And it goes on and on from there.

And I remember I would start reading. And we'd read it a number of different times before. But maybe at age three or maybe three to four, his imagination was starting to kick in in a further way.

And so I got to the place where the wild things roared their terrible roars and showed their terrible claws. And he was sitting in my arm and started to tremble and really get scared. And he said, Stop, Dad, stop.

Okay, I'll stop. I put it down. And I went to another book.

I picked it up and I started reading it. Read it for a little bit and try said, No, read that one. So I'd pick up where the wild things are.

And we get to the place where the wild things would roar their terrible roars and show their terrible claws. And he starts shaking again. And we went through this two or three times.

What was it? Well, on the one hand, he wanted to be scared. And on the other hand, he didn't. There's something of that capacity for awe that's at the root of great religions, this idea of the mystery, this one who is other.

You think of the vision of Isaiah in the temple where the temple is shaking and Isaiah is shaking where he sees the glory of the Lord holy and lifted up in the angels. And he says, Woe is me, for I'm undone. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

So not only is the temple shaking, but Isaiah starts shaking because he's in the presence of the holy God, the one before whom the angels say, Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts,

heaven and earth is full of his glory. And he's in awe over that. And there is that capacity in various religions of the numinous or the mysterious before whom you tremble.

And that's what Otto emphasizes. Even various animistic faiths where the spirits are in the trees or in the animals or in various aspects of creation, very mysterious, and can produce a fearfulness and rites and rituals like killing chickens and other kinds of things in order to ward off the evil spirits. But there's something about that numinous, the mysterious, the spirits that are out there in the world, the mystery before whom we tremble that's there in many religions, and Christianity has it in common with these other religions.

But then you have something else. Well, what Lewis says with respect to this capacity for awe and trembling is this, is that there seem to be only two views we can hold about awe. That's A-W-E.

We can hold about awe. Either it is a mere twist in the human mind, corresponding to nothing objective and serving no biological function, yet showing no tendency to disappear from that mind at its fullest development in poet, philosopher, or saint, or else it's a direct experience of the supernatural to which the name revelation might properly be given. So this capacity for awe, I suppose you could just see it as a mere biological quirk full of sound and fury signifying nothing, but certainly this capacity for awe, as he says, doesn't disappear in people that are the highest of beings.

At least we normally consider the poet, the philosopher, the saint, the novelist that often focuses on these mysterious things as part of the fascination of our literature and our movies. It's certainly something that is fascinated the highest, you might say, of human beings, or else this capacity for awe is a cosmic pointer that points beyond. So there's something there in the numinous that's part of Christianity.

Certainly it shares with other religious perspectives. The second aspect that Lewis points to is the moral. There are some that are less numinous and more focused on moral obligation, and this is, he describes in *Abolition of Man*, the belief that certain attitudes are really true and others really false, and he points to certain aspects of, say, Stoicism, or the ethical church, or other rather moral perspectives that are held.

Like in his work, his novel, Lewis's novel, *Till We Have Faces*, you have the battle between the numinous, the god of unget, and the moral. There's Fox, who's the tutor of the heroine there, that's a Greek philosopher, and teaches her the moral perspective. So the whole battle in the whole book, *Till We Have Faces*, it's hard to understand it apart from this, is the whole thing of the moral and the numinous.

It's at the background, and struggling with which really shows you the way to things. And of course in the end of the book, you see that neither contains the whole of the truth, but at least a part of the truth. So the moral is certainly there in some religious perspectives, and with less emphasis on the numinous.

And again, Lewis gives us an either-or. He says, either we are rational spirit, obliged forever to obey the absolute values of the Tao, and by Tao he means the moral law here, as he describes it in *Abolition of Man*. Or else we are mere nature to be needed and cut into new

shapes for the pleasures of masters, who must by hypothesis have no motive but their own natural impulses.

So this idea of the moral does seem to be rooted in reality, and it's even something that in no matter what the religious perspective, there seems to be an acknowledgment somewhere or another of the moral. At the end of *Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis lists a rather long list of quotations of various religious authors or leaders on the moral. So you see the shape of what you could call the natural law or the moral law throughout various cultures, even within religions that, on the one hand, deny that there is anything objectively right or wrong, good or evil.

You'll find nevertheless an assertion of the moral, somehow or another, in the writings. So it seems to be something that's very deeply grounded within various religious perspectives. But you have some religions that are mostly numinous.

Certainly Christianity can acknowledge the truthfulness there. And you have some religions that are almost all moral, and Christianity would certainly agree with the moral perspective, but would say, with regard to the numinous, that that's true as far as it goes, but there's more than that. With regard to the moral, well, that's true as far as it goes, but there's more than that.

And then the third level is the combination of the numinous and the moral. That's where the holy, the other one, the one that causes us to tremble, one who produces awe, becomes the guardian of the moral. And we particularly find that within the great theistic faiths.

Say Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all have a God who is other, transcendent, and then a God who's also an embodiment of the moral. And again, Lewis has an either-or with respect to it. He says that it's more than wish fulfillment, and we desire the experience of the one who's angry with our sin.

(17:10 - 18:37)

That's a strange phenomena and seems counterintuitive, but he says, once more, it may be madness, a madness congenital to man and oddly unfortunate in its results, or it may be revelation. So there's a commonality here that Christianity certainly can agree with Islam and with Judaism on the combination of the numinous and the moral, this God who is other and transcendent, and then also the embodiment of the moral that not only shows us the way to understand right and wrong, but also shows us that we're guilty and we fall short, that we're sinners. Although particularly in Islam, there's not that same kind of accent on sin, or at least on the idea of original sin, as there might be at least in more orthodox Judaism.

But the fourth element that really sets Christianity apart from all these other religious perspectives is the idea of the incarnation. You know, Christianity would agree with the numinous as far as it goes, and the moral as far as it goes, and the numinous and moral being combined as far as it goes. But no other religion has the idea of God coming down in the flesh.

(18:38 - 20:47)

In all the other religions, it's people having to rise up, placate the spirits, do the moral, somehow find a way to do enough good works, perhaps, to earn your way to salvation. But particularly with Christianity, God comes down to us in the incarnation. This historical person, the coming of Christ, eliminates the alienation between the numinous, the one who's numinous and moral, in a way that other religions don't have as clear understanding or explanation for how that is overcome.

Here's Lewis's comment on this issue. Says, Islam denies the incarnation. It will not allow that God is descended into flesh or that mankind has been exalted into deity.

It is the sharp curved line of the prophet's blade that cuts the obedience from the obeyed. It stands for all religions that are afraid of matter and afraid of mystery. Particularly in the incarnation that Lewis sees the superiority of Christianity over these other religions of the world.

Because in Christianity, the numinous, this mysterious one who's other, becomes articulate in Christ. He also argues that the moral finds his clearest expression in Christ. He argues as well that the best expression of the numinous as guardian of the moral is in Christ.

Here's what he says in a letter to Sheldon von Aachen. He says, if you ever read the Analects of Confucius, he ends up by saying, this is the Tao. I do not know if anyone's ever kept it.

And that's significant. One can really go directly from there to the Epistle to the Romans. So how do you deal with this issue of sin or falling short of this one who's both numinous and moral? It's God who's both good but also a judge.

(20:48 - 22:25)

How do you end up dealing with it? So it kind of sets apart Christianity and shows the uniqueness of Christian claims in comparison to other religious perspectives. Another thing that is helpful in providing is an analogy that shows, and it's in his chapter in God in the Dock called Christian Apologetics, as well as in other places, is the idea of the thick and the clear. You might talk about it as soup religion.

He uses the analogy of soups. One kind of soup is a thick soup, like a rich, meaty beef broth, or beef, not a beef broth, a beef stew, with this very dark and very thick with lots of different elements in it. And then the other analogy of another type of religion is the clear, like a chicken consommé, it's very clear in its consistency.

And for the thick religions, it's religions that are very mysterious. It's more numinous. It's religions that have rites and rituals and blood and sacrifice and rites and all these things going on.

And then the clear religions are more like the moral religions that are out there. And he says that, here's the way he puts it, by thick I mean those which have orgies and ecstasies and local attachments. Africa is full of thick religions.

(22:26 - 22:46)

He said, by clear, I mean those which are philosophical and ethically universalizing, like Stoicism, Buddhism, and the Ethical Church are clear religions. Now, if there's a true religion, it must be both thick and clear. You need to follow this.

(22:46 - 23:32)

Why? Why does the true religion need to be both thick and clear? Because God must have made both the child and the man, both the savage and the citizen, both the head and the belly. In other words, is true faith only for the adult, for the intellectual, for the one that can think philosophically? That's like the moral, it's more of a philosophical faith. But what about the pagan in Africa? What about the person who's illiterate somewhere? Is there something that will really address where they are? How about the child? There's something that where a child can even grasp it, who doesn't, it's not particularly educated.

(23:34 - 25:01)

He says that, again, the true religion must be both thick and clear, for the true God must have made both the child and the man, both the savage and the citizen, both the head and the belly. The only two religions that satisfy this condition, he believes, are Hinduism and Christianity. But Hinduism fulfills it imperfectly.

The clear religions of the Brahmin hermit in the jungle and the thick religion of the neighboring temple go on side by side. The Brahmin hermit does not bother about the temple prostitution, though the worshiper in the temple about the hermit's metaphysics. But Christianity really breaks down the middle wall of the partition.

It takes a convert from Central Africa and teaches him to obey an enlightened universalistic ethic. So the person who's the African who's there looking at nature's spirits in the trees and perhaps sacrificing chickens to ward off evil spirits, those that are thick using rite and ritual and blood and sacrifice, that kind of thing, the thick person has to become clear, come to an enlightened ethic like the Sermon on the Mount. But he said it also works in the reverse fashion, that the clear have to become thick.

(25:02 - 27:52)

He says that Christianity also takes a 20th century prig like me and tells me to go fasting to a mystery, to drink the blood of the Lord. The savage convert has to become clear. I have to become thick.

That's how one knows one has come on to the real religion. One of these analogies that makes you ponder and think about something of the nature of reality. In any case, I found it helpful or provocative at least to think about the different religious perspectives and how they might be combined.

It's often one of the things that's most offensive to people about Christianity is the passion of the Christ as we see Christ's death on the cross and the blood and the gore and the sacrifice. Why is this necessary? It seems very repugnant, very repulsive, very offensive to us, puts people off. That's the thick element, or if you go back to the Old Testament, sacrifice, animal sacrifice, that kind of thing.

That's very troubling, very problematic to many. That's the thick aspect, but then you also have the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. You have very profound

elements in the Old and New Testament that are thick, and you have very profound elements that are clear, and you have a real combination between the two that no one person, depending on where they come from, either from the thick or clear, can remain where they are.

They have to understand something of the nature of reality. Isn't reality both thick and clear? Isn't there something mysterious, the way Lewis puts it in the Narnia Chronicles, a magic, even deeper magic, that goes back to the beginning of time? So you have mystery as well as clarity that happens, and I think that's what Lewis talks about. And again, until we have faces, that's particularly the battle.

It's between the thick and the clear, the thick religion of Angget and the clear religion of Fox is expounded. And in the end of the book, Fox is on trial before the gods, and he does have to admit that what he had to say as a teacher of the clear was true as far as it goes, but it wasn't enough. And the question is, what is ultimately the answer to the thick and the clear, the mysterious and clarity? And what Lewis finds is the answer is particularly found to be in Christ.

(27:54 - 29:05)

There's an interesting passage with Lewis that will raise the next question I want to deal with. What about those who don't accept Christ? Well, I've often been asked, as one who's written on Lewis and as one who speaks on Lewis, about a particular passage in the last battle, the last one, the seventh one of the Narnian Chronicles. And in the last battle, you have the last days of Narnia, and you have an ape by the name of Shift who starts a false religion by dressing a donkey in a lion skin to impersonate Aslan.

Now, the Shift follows the religion of the Calamon in the worship of Tash, as very much opposed to the worship of Aslan. And Tash demands human sacrifice and other evil practices. And Shift claims that Tash and Aslan are one and calls the new god Tash-Aslan.

(29:06 - 30:52)

I still remember the first time I read that to my son, sons. I can remember Trey, my oldest son, just being horrified, you know, this Tash-Aslan, how could that be? How can Tash and Aslan be one? It cannot be. But anyway, there's one of the heroes here, Emeth, and Emeth happens to be the Hebrew word for truth.

So Emeth is a young soldier who believes in Tash, but concentrates on Tash's awesomeness, like the more numinous aspect, I suppose, not on his cruelty. Shift, the ape, claims that Tash is in a certain building and Emeth, even under the threat of death, the possibility of death, enters the building and is killed. And he finds himself, right after that, wandering in the afterlife, rather dazed and confused, but he's happy.

And he comes upon, as he does that, Aslan. And on the one hand, he's afraid to meet Aslan because he's opposed Aslan all of his life and he's really believed in Tash. So how is he going to be received? And yet, on the other hand, he wants to be honest with where he really is.

And here's the little section in the last battle that has troubled many or raised questions. Here's what it says there. It's page 164, 165 of some versions in the last battle.

(30:53 - 31:31)

In a narrow place between two rocks, there came to meet me a great lion. I fell at his feet and thought, surely this is the hour of death. For the lion who's worthy of all honor will know that I've served Tash all my days and not him.

Nevertheless, it's better to see the lion and die than to be Tisrok of the whole world and live and not have seen him. But the glorious one, Aslan, bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, son, thou art welcome. But I said, alas, Lord, I'm no son of thine, but the servant of Tash.

(31:32 - 33:12)

He answered, child, all the service thou hast done to Tash I account as service done to me. Then, by reason of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the glorious one and said, Lord, is it then true, as the ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The lion growled so that the earth shook, but his wrath was not against me. He said, it is false, not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites.

I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me he is truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him.

If any man do cruelty in my name, then although he says the name of Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves, and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, child? I said, Lord, thou knowest how much I understand. But I said also, for the truth constrained me, yet I've been seeking Tash all my days.

Beloved, said the glorious one, unless thy desire had been for me, thou wouldst not have sought so long and so true. For all find what they truly seek. That's a tantalizing and troubling passage, because it seems to open up salvation, and at least in Narni here, last battle to one who does not know or believe, say, in Aslan.

(33:14 - 39:54)

And the question is, did Lewis just mean that to be the case in fiction, or is he really trying to teach something here that he's relating to theology? And he does in a letter reveal that he is trying to teach something theologically. He says in one of his letters, he says, I think every prayer that's even made to a false god or to a very imperfectly conceived true god is accepted by the true god, and that Christ saves many who do not think they know him, for he's dimly present in the good side of the inferior teachers whom they follow. In the parable of the sheep and goats, that is Matthew 25, 3 and following, those who are saved do not seem to know that they've served Christ.

He says, and note this particularly, but of course our anxiety about unbelievers is most perfectly employed when it leads not to speculation, notice that, speculation, but to earnest prayer for them and attempt to be in our own lives such good advertisements for Christianity as will make it attractive. Notice that he does say that even though I suppose he hopes this is true, and who could perhaps not join him in that hope, he does say that this is a speculation, and I don't think it really has biblical warrant. Let me step back and just make a couple comments about this issue, and it comes down to three basic positions.

First of all, pluralism, inclusivism, exclusivism. Let me just quickly give you a definition of them and then talk for just a few minutes about each one. First of all, pluralism maintains that many, there are many ways to God, and that all different religions lead to the top of the mountain.

Some may go in a more circuitous fashion than others, but all of them make it up to the top of the mountain. There's a sense in which for the pluralist, all religions are the same, or at least end up with the same result, have the same similar kinds of experiences, and end up at the same place. They're not really necessarily in tension with each other, so we can endorse them all.

It doesn't really matter which road you follow. That's the pluralist perspective. The inclusivist perspective is the second one, and that seems to be what Lewis was maintaining, is this, that the only way to be saved is through Christ.

The only way to be saved in the last battle is through Aslan, but you don't necessarily need to know the name of Christ or Aslan in order to be saved. And there are a number of people, we'll go back and look at that in a minute, in the contemporary world that try to actually argue this biblically, not just as a speculation, but as actually a biblical reality. Then the exclusivist says that the only way to be saved is through Christ, but you do need to know the name of Christ in order to be saved.

Let me make some quick comments on these things, realizing that they will not be fully adequate to address the whole issue. In order to do that, it would take quite a bit of reading and study, and there are whole books that are devoted to it. Perhaps the one I recommend first, because it's shorter and more concise, is a book by Ronald Nash called *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* And he particularly looks at this issue and looks at pluralism, inclusivism, exclusivism from a biblical point of view and does a great job.

Another much more comprehensive book that really addresses this issue of Christianity and pluralism and all these issues is a book by D.A. Carson called *The Gagging of God*. A rather massive work, but he's also very thorough in the way that he addresses these issues, plumbing the depths on all these different questions. So I point you particularly to those two, as well as there are other books out there that will do it.

But let me just make some, give you some comments on each one of these, and then you can go later to do some more thorough study. The pluralist perspective that there are many ways to God is, or that all religions are essentially or fundamentally the same, seems to go very much counter to reality as you look at it. There's a poem by Steve Turner, who's a Christian, that says that while all religions are the same, at least the one that we read was, they only differ on matters of God, on the matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

You know, let's just stop and talk about that for a second, just to hit the tip of the iceberg. With respect to creation, atheists or materialists say that all is matter, that all we have is the natural world. Then we have the eastern religious perspective, say Hinduism and Buddhism, that say all is spirit, and they say there is no such thing as matter, because matter involves

distinction, cause and effect, a real creation, or a real world that's out here, and they essentially reject the idea of the world, it's all illusory anyway.

There's no ultimate distinction between you and me, between me and the chair, between me and a table, between me and a tree. Even though it appears to be so, that's the great problem that's to be overcome. We're ignorant of the fact that the world is non-distinct, that it's actually one, and we live in this world where we're deceived by the illusion that things are actually distinct.

There's a real distinction between true and false and good or evil. So with respect to creation, there's a denial of creation, as opposed to the saying that matter is all there is. There is no such thing as matter.

Whereas Christianity says that there is matter and there is spirit, but particularly all matter is there because of the supernatural. God has come to create the world, and so the source of matter, the source of creation, is a supernatural source, that God has made things, there is a beginning to things, that God made the world. So there's a profound difference with respect to creation.

(39:55 - 42:18)

So it's not only there with respect to creation, but sin. Within the atheist perspective, there is no such thing as sin. Everything's relative, it's just a matter of your perspective.

Who are we to judge another culture? We've looked at that in various other aspects of this course and on other tapes. In the new age, in Hinduism or Buddhism, there are many people that say that there is no such thing as real objective evil or good. So there is no basis to say that there's sin, whereas in Christianity there is basis for good and evil, right or wrong, and that's held in common by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

So massive differences, a grand canyon of difference between people that acknowledge that there is a creation and those that say that there's not, that there is right and wrong, good or evil, and those that say that there's not. It seems contradictory, one or the other. Heaven, hell, God, and salvation, or an idea of God, that there is no God in terms of the atheist perspective.

That whatever, in quotes, God there is, is one with nature, is more the eastern approach. That God is in, say, Islam, all you have to say in order to be a Muslim, is Allah is one, and Muhammad is his prophet. But they would very firmly reject this, rejected in the Quran, certainly rejected by Judaism, that God is triune, or that Jesus, Jesus would be, by many Jews, denied to be the Messiah or incarnate.

Within Islam they would give a tremendous place for Jesus, but as a human prophet, and certainly not as the God-man. So a massive difference, say, Islam would say that Christ didn't die on the cross. Christianity says Christ did die on the cross.

So it's hard to say that all religions are the same. I'm just going through a very superficial sweep of these various ideas to try to show that certainly not all religions are the same. They maintain very contradictory things with regard to life after death, for instance, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

(42:19 - 42:35)

We won't deal with the whole issue of heaven and hell, but at least even life after death, with atheism, when you're dead, you're gone. You only go around once, so live your life with gusto, and so there's no life after death. There's no accountability for whatever you do in life.

(42:36 - 44:05)

It doesn't matter how much evil you've done. When you're dead, there's no balancing of the scales. You're just dead and gone, from dust to dust.

There's nothing after that. In the Hindu-Buddhist perspective, the whole destiny of life in Hinduism is absorption, like the drop is absorbed back into the ocean of being, but you lose your individuality. There's no individual survival after death.

In fact, that's to be something to be strongly rejected. So you just become absorbed. Or within Buddhism, nirvana means in the Sanskrit, extinction, as in the blowing out of a candle, and there's no self to exist in many forms of Buddhism either, and so the idea of extinction, there's again no individual survival after death, as opposed to Christianity, where you do have people that continue to live on forever, either under salvation or judgment.

Why C.S. Lewis is able to say there are no ordinary people, and you've never met a mere mortal. The people you meet every day are going to live forever. That means that they must be taken seriously.

As people of dignity and worth, even the most boring person you meet is not an ordinary person. They're not a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, he says, what are these? They are to our life as the life of a gnat.

(44:06 - 48:27)

Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, a political reign, the longest nation that's out there may exist for, you know, a presidential term, four years or eight years, a nation, U.S., more than 200 years, China, who knows, 1,000, 2,000 years, but what is that to the life of just one human being that will live forever? That's why within the West and within Christian circles, the individuals given dignity, certain inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that are rooted somehow intrinsically within human beings. I don't know of any other basis to explain that other than people are made in the image of God. So this idea that there is dignity there and that there is an eternal extension to life is utterly unique or sets apart Christianity from other religious perspectives and so on and so on with respect to God and with respect to salvation.

The idea of salvation by grace through faith is utterly unique there. You don't find that in Judaism. You don't find it really in Islam, not in the same way that you see it within Christianity.

So you see the grand canyons of difference between different religious perspectives as you go through them. So pluralism doesn't certainly fit with classical Christianity. It's hard to make the case for pluralism to say all religions are the same or all religious experiences are the same or they all lead to the strange result.

So they all have the same ethic, not if you really study it deeply. That's only for people that have the superficial knowledge of religious perspectives. But the second area, the area of inclusivism, there are a number of people at whole.

As I say, it seems like Lewis was being more inclusivistic in his understanding here, and I suppose it's a good thing to hope that this is the case, and there are a number of people that argue that it is the case, but it doesn't seem like it washes really with a lot of the explicit passages of Scripture. Like in John 14, 6, it says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.

Or in Acts 4, 12, there is no salvation. There is salvation in no one else, for there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Or another passage, John 3, 18, he who believes in him is not condemned.

He who does not believe is condemned already. John 1, 12, but to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God. Or in Romans 10, verse 14, but how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they're sent? So it seems that call is for us to go out and proclaim the name of Jesus, and people believe on the basis of that name.

Now often what inclusivists do is they are trying to say, for instance, with regard to John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. They'll say, yeah, the only way a person can be saved is through Jesus, but they don't necessarily need to know the name of Jesus to be saved.

They somehow have distrust, as Lewis has somehow of Emeth, regard to Tash, that it's a faith principle. It's not rooted in an explicit knowledge of Jesus, but it does lead to salvation. That's hard to add on to this John 14, 6. All right, or they'll say, yeah, Acts 4, 12, there's salvation in no one else, for there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

(48:27 - 50:36)

We'll say, yeah, salvation only comes through Christ, but what about those who don't know? In other words, they'll say, ontologically, the only way to be saved is through Christ. We don't necessarily epistemologically need to know about Christ to be saved. Well, it seems if you multiply not only these, but there are a whole lot of other passages, it's hard to make that case.

Often what inclusivists do is they point to fringe passages or mystery passages, such as in the Old Testament, Genesis 14, Melchizedek, who's this strange figure that seems out of nowhere, king of Salem, king of peace, and Abraham offers tithes to him. So, who is this priest that we don't know of? It doesn't seem to be of the priesthood of Levi, and of course we have a lot about Melchizedek there later in Hebrews, but who is this strange person that comes out of nowhere? Or Job, where does he come from? How does he become faithful? He doesn't seem clearly to be in a Jewish context. Or how about Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who we meet in the wilderness that seems to be a priest.

Or how about Naaman, you know, who comes, and so on and so on. They'll look at shadowy figures, ones that we don't know a lot about, but they seem to have at least openness to issues of faith. Or, say, people in the Old Testament, how are they saved? I'd say this is one area, though, where I think you can give a pretty clear answer.

It seems to be that even in the cases of some of these shadowy figures, or in the case of people in the Old Testament, they end up believing not in something vague, they're not without knowledge, they believe in the promises of the covenant, which are ultimately fulfilled in Christ. They don't believe in nothing, or in something vague. They believe in something that's really rooted in foundations in historical redemptive history, that has its fulfillment in Christ.

So the way I look at the Old Testament is people believed in that which they knew. They believed in the covenant promises. So it's not the same as believing in nothing, or believing in anything.

(50:37 - 54:28)

So it doesn't seem to me that the Old Testament believers are really a true or good or helpful analogy, as is often used. And we could take each one of these characters I've mentioned, I won't take the time to do that right now, and talk about each one in their own place, but often what it points to are things that are on the fringe, or Cornelius, what's the in Acts, particularly in Acts chapter 8. It seems that though, Cornelius, even though he was a God-fearer, was not saved, because Peter had to preach the gospel, particularly in preaching the gospel that Cornelius was really touched by the power of Christ's death and resurrection, and the power of the Spirit came upon him, particularly at that time. So we don't have any kind of clear endorsement of somehow a saved status of Cornelius before the proclamation that Peter gave to him.

And there are many other passages we could point to that the inclusivists address, and again I point you to Ronald Nash's book, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, or to D. A. Carson's book, *Gagging of God*, or there are a number of other books out there on this issue. But there are those, again, that argue using Scripture, using these sort of parenthesis sorts of things, or characters that are a little bit unclear to argue for this inclusivist perspective. I think that the explicit case for Scripture is in line with the exclusivist perspective, and again Lewis in that letter says that we're better served if we don't engage in these kinds of speculations that are without warrant of the clear explicit teaching of Scripture, where you have to kind of add in some other assumptions that are not explicitly warranted, and focus on being the best advocate or the best advertisement, he says, for Scripture you can possibly be.

But coming down to the final contrast between faith in Christ and other religious perspectives, Lewis says this, what are we to make of Jesus Christ? He talks about Jesus' claims and the various claims he makes of himself that are rather shocking. Look at the titles that he's willing to receive, the worship he's willing to receive from his disciples, we see that particularly in Matthew, you see the attributes of God that are given to Jesus, the claims which if not true are those of a megalomaniac, compared with whom Hitler was the most sane and humble of men. There's no halfway house and there's no parallel in other religions.

If you'd gone to Buddha and asked him, are you the son of Brahma? He would have said, my son, you're still in the veil of illusion. If you'd gone to Socrates and asked, are you Zeus? He would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Muhammad and asked, are you Allah? He would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off.

If you had asked Confucius, are you heaven? I think he probably would have replied, remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste. The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion, which undermines the whole mind of man.

If you think you're a poached egg, when you're looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane. But if you think you're God, there's no chance for you. We may note in passing that he was never regarded as a mere moral teacher.

(54:28 - 55:20)

He did not produce that effect in any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects, hatred, terror, and adoration. There is no trace of people expressing mild approval.

Of course, it was Lewis that made the classic argument you get in this passage, and I also made it in Mere Christianity, the liar, lord, lunatic argument. We dealt earlier with the idea that he's a legend or that Jesus didn't say these things or that the New Testament account is not valid, so I'm not going to consider that alternative. But if you look at the claims that Jesus made about himself, they're either true or they're not true.

If these claims that Jesus made about himself are true, then he's Lord. If the claims are not true, there's one of two options. One, he knew that they were not true or he didn't know that they weren't true.

(55:21 - 58:08)

If he knew that they were not true but said them anyway, he'd be an incredible liar, equivalent with the devil in hell. It would be rather awful to make that kind of claim knowing it was false. Or if he made these kinds of claims not knowing that they were false and they were false, then he'd be more like the lunatic.

I've met people, for instance, when I was speaking in a prison once, I met a guy who wrote me letters as God. He was somewhat articulate. He was obviously a very brilliant guy, but you could easily discern in him a kind of insanity.

There was something off about him that everybody noticed, and they would sort of smile. He could write very clearly and very articulately, but there was something there, this lunacy that was there. But how could one who's a lunatic turn people that are broken into people that are whole or take people from ways of evil into following a path for the good? How could he really heal people that have all kinds of difficulties and make them whole? How could this kind of insanity make people sane? So this idea of the liar-lord-lunatic leads down to, you can put it in the most simple way, that Christ is either God who is not good.

That's the way you put it in a nutshell. So there's something about Christianity and its claims that it's either true or it's not true. It's particularly because it's rooted in history.

It either happened or it didn't happen. It is true or it didn't. It's not true.

I've mentioned a number of different times that Lewis says, if these things are true, it's of infinite importance. If it's not true, it's of no importance. But the one thing it cannot be is of moderate importance.

There's something unique about the historical claims of Christ and the exclusive claims to be the way of salvation that make it either true or not true, that Christ is either God or he's not good. And it is a stumbling block and an offense, but I don't quite know how you remove it without altering the character of Orthodox Christianity. Obviously, it needs to be held in a way that speaks the truth and love to people and is open to listening to the truths in other religions.

It's open to acknowledging truth where you may find it, but speaking with gentleness and respect and love to communicate the truth of the gospel.