

Nones & Dones Slide

Nones & Dones descriptor- invitation to Xmas

Today- An idea I hear a lot of- "I'm fine with Xianity- but I don't understand how you can think that your particular way is right and everyone else is wrong..."

- "I think claiming that your way is the only way is **arrogant**. How could you tell someone else that you have the corner market on God? That says that you think you are superior to the Buddhist, or the Muslim, or anybody else that has an idea about God.
- Besides, all that exclusivity does is **cause division and wars** and violence....just look at September 11th, 2001.
- Everyone should have a seat at the table, and we should really **focus on what we agree on**...like being good to others and making this a good society.
- **Have your personal beliefs**...that's fine, but don't force your belief system on somebody else. That's oppressive and intolerant."

Now in that objection to Christianity there are several claims...some true, some misguided. Let's talk about them.

Title Slide- "Inclusively Exclusive: Why Jesus is Only Way to Be Saved" - Acts 4:8-20, 10,

To address these objections, We are going to look at two different times in the book of Acts that the Apostle Peter preached a sermon...and got in trouble for it.

We're going to start in Acts chapter 4.

This is the very early stages of the church-where the apostles are going around preaching about Jesus' death and resurrection and telling people what it means.

Along with that- they were doing healing signs.

Peter has just healed a man that couldn't walk- and he is being questions about it. Listen to what he says.

Acts 4:7-12

After they had Peter and John stand before them, they began to question them: "By what power or in what name have you done this?"

8 Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders: 9 If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead — by him this man is standing here before you healthy. 11 This Jesus is

the stone rejected by you builders,

which has become the cornerstone.

12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

We have a tendency to think that religious pluralism, (the idea that all religions have equal value and are equally valid) is a new idea.

But actually, this is exactly the climate in Peter's world.

- The Roman government actually had a building dedicated to religious pluralism called a Pantheon.
- So they had statues of all the gods of the day from all the cultures that they had conquered in this building
- In an effort to promote tolerance, the government said "Hey, we'll recognize that your god, just know that yours is not any better than your neighbor's." All the gods are equal...because Caesar says they are.
- So Christianity came into existence in a Pluralist society
- And Rome's problem with Christianity was not that they didn't want people to worship Jesus. It was that they couldn't have people saying Jesus was the ONLY one who could be worshipped.

So when Peter is told to stop preaching Jesus as the only way to God, he defends himself

Acts 4:19-20

19 Peter and John answered them, "Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; 20 for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

From this passage, I want to confront the idea that Christianity is an arrogant intolerant religion....that its honorable or respectful to say that all religions basically believe the

same thing... and maybe surprisingly for you- I want you to see how Xianity is the most inclusive exclusivity the world has ever known.

1) Christianity is based on news delivered in humility, not arrogant opinions.

- The whole concept of being a Christian hinges on humility...not arrogance.
- Take the Bible's description of Jesus.
- Jesus, is presented as God in the flesh, who in an incredible act of humility, became a man, lived a perfect life, then died a criminal's death...without ever playing the "I'm God so you better back off" card.
- All the while he hung out with the lowest people of society, and said things that scared people off, instead of pandering to crowds who would make a big deal about him.
- And Jesus also said
- **John 14:6**
- **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"**
- So which is it? Is Jesus the humble man that gave his life for people that rejected him or is he the intolerant guy that demanded he is the only way?
- The claim of Jesus to be the only way cannot be a statement of arrogance unless we call Jesus a liar...or say he's mentally unstable.
- We can't say Jesus was a great moral teacher like Buddha or Muhammed..., but he's not God.
- That is a caricature of Jesus that the Bible doesn't even leave open to us. He either has to be telling the truth, or he's certifiably insane.

So perhaps when he says "I AM THE WAY. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME."- Its not that he's being arrogant. Its that he is saying what is true.

Acts 4:19-20

- See, when Peter says here that they are simply testifying to what they have "seen and heard" he is saying "This is has nothing to do with an inner feeling I've had confirming that this is the one true religion."
- Rather, Peter is saying "You can't keep us from making this claim because we saw a man rise from the gravel!...and this is what he told us. A humble

man, claimed to be God, told us that he was dying in our place to make us acceptable to God...and then told us to tell people!"

- He's telling these officials "Look, we are not here to offend you, but when a guy dies and then comes back to life...when we have to choose between listening to you or him...we go with the guy who used to be dead. "We are just reporting the news...what we have seen and heard!"
- **Acts 4:13**
- **13 When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus.**

Did you see that?

- The council has the same problem with Jesus' followers that our culture has today, and that anybody should have with JESUS
- They say, these guys are so bold...so arrogant...but at the same time there is nothing about them that should produce arrogance
 - They are commoners, ordinary fishermen, uneducated.
 - Not only that, Peter was the guy that before Jesus' death was DENYING Jesus.
 - HE SAW SOMETHING, objectively, that took him from a coward to someone that was recognized as "**bold**"
- See, here's the way people often think today.
 - If we are humble and honest, we must admit that there is no way that one group of people can understand God. We have to listen to everybody.
- You may have heard it put this way.
- **Indian Elephant Parable**
 - Blind men asked to describe an elephant
 - One feels trunk, says "Like a hose"
 - One feels leg, says "Like a tree"
 - One feels tail, "Like a rope"
 - On and on it goes.
 - The moral of the parable is that each of us is blind, and in our different approaches to God we can understand a part of him.
 - So each religion is "right" in what they understand, so we should all listen to one another to get a richer and fuller experience of who God is.
 - Let me admit, this is an attractive way to think about God. It feels humble, doesn't it?

But there's a problem...

- In order to tell this story, you have to see the whole elephant. You have to make a claim about an objective truth and tell other people their perception is wrong. Which is what you are trying to avoid in the first place!
- To claim that all religions are right or wrong, you have claim to have a superior vantage point from all other religions.
- You have to see all the blind people groping the elephant- and according to your own understanding of arrogance- say "No- you don't see it right...i do"

In 2018- at the height of the #MeToo movement-

Oprah Winfrey at the Golden Globe Awards-

"What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have."-Oprah Winfrey

Here's the problem with that.

First- by individualizing truth and making it personal, but NOT OBJECTIVE ("my truth" instead of "the truth")- she is undercutting the very thing that the MeToo movement was speaking out about.

That is- that thousands of women's stories of sexual assault and abuse were ACTUALLY OBJECTIVELY true. They had ACTUALLY HAPPENED. But by reducing something that really happened in history only down to a personal experience of some situation that can be interpreted anyway a person sees fit- then all the men that abused and assaulted those women could just speak their own truth. And according to Oprah's philosophy- we'd just have to say "Amen. Your truth is as valid as anyone else's."

But the truth is objective AND personal. What happens in the real world also effects us...and the way we see the world. So the truth MUST be objective AND personal... there is a way that each of us experiences truth. But the me too movement wasn't about personal experience of an amoral event that could be interpreted any way you see fit. It was history. Terrible, horrible, gut wrenching history. And we had to reckon with it...even as many people were offended by it.

The other problem with what Oprah said- is that she is making an objective universal truth claim that applies to all people. "One thing I know for sure...!" So is that arrogant- forcing her beliefs on all of us?

By the standards often put on Christianity- it certainly is.

Back to 1)

- But Peter's point in this passage is that he does NOT have a superior point of view.
- His point is that there is no way he could ever stumble upon God.
- God had to show himself to us.
- He had to come to us....as one of us, tell us about himself, then die and resurrect to show he IS GOD.
- Peter is saying "I didn't find God as a blind man, God found me, and made me see."
- Peter was full of doubts....until he saw Jesus die and come back to life.

- Peter is saying "I'm a regular guy. I'm just taking Jesus at his word...not because he is one among many that I chose, but because YOU KILLED HIM AND THEN WE HAD BREAKFAST WITH HIM"

- Listen, If a dead guy eats a fish later....that changes EVERYTHING.
 - We are no longer talking about picking your favorite Ice Cream.
 - We aren't talking about a subjective feeling about "what works for you"
 - We are talking about an entirely new category of claim...one that says "Listen up, I'm God...and now I'm going to show you"

- The Gospel is news.
- It is more than, but not less than that, the account of an event in history.
- The death and resurrection of Jesus. A good man who claimed to be God.
- So determining how we engage other religions shouldn't be based on how we feel about them or the people that believe them, rather on whether or not their claims are trustworthy.
- In Christianity's case, did Jesus resurrect?...because if he did...we better listen to him.

Transition: Here's the other idea that Peter's claim counters.

- Its disrespectful to tell people their beliefs are wrong. (or to insinuate they are wrong by saying your way is the only right way)

But if we scrutinize that idea, we'll see that...

2) Its disrespectful to misrepresent what others believe, and its possible to honor a person while disagreeing.

You may have heard, or said yourself, "**All religions basically say the same thing. "Love people, and be a good person. Help make the world a better place."**

That's very different than what Peter says... with his statement here he says **"It's got nothing to do with what I prefer or what works for me, it has to do with who God says He is and how God says we get to Him."**

Our culture is heavily influenced by an idea expressed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant

- That is that all religions are subjectively helpful, but none are objectively true.
- In other words, religions are like flavors of Ice Cream.
 - Sure you can say one taste better to you
 - But that is not true like saying $2 + 2 = 4$.

It doesn't really matter what you believe- as long as it leads to being kind and self-less.

Religions are just values. They aren't making factual claims.

Acts 4:20

But Peter makes an objective claim about an observable reality. The claim of a first hand witness that says "I saw something happen, in Public, in the real world."

And that changed everything for Peter.

- Before Jesus' resurrection- when he was accused of being one of Jesus' followers he said, NO, not me!
- Now people are telling him to SHUT UP about it under the threat of imprisonment and death...and he keeps preaching!

Peter's religion wasn't an attempt to be the best person he could be. It was a response to re-interpreting everything Jesus had told him BEFORE he died...now in LIGHT of his resurrection.

If you were to say to Peter, "I appreciate some of the ways your religion helps you...but stop trying to convert people. All religions believe basically the same thing...so there is no point in offending others by trying to convince them your way is right."

Peter would look at you and say- "What in the world are you talking about?"

Think about this for a minute. attempting to persuade someone to change their beliefs is a sign of respect. You are treating them as thinking agents with the ability to consider the same evidence and information you considered...and letting them decide what they believe...instead of letting them just be products of their cultural environment.

So we shouldn't be offended when people challenge our beliefs- we should be flattered!

And to say that all religions are the same and teach basically the same thing- completely discounts what people of all those religions have believed for hundreds to thousands of years.

A sign of honor and respect is to actually represent honestly what people believe instead of telling them on a glance that their belief is just like a flavor of ice cream.

We live in a time where we are being shaped, especially in the political realm, to understand that disagreement must mean disrespect. And that I can't be friends or even honor someone if they believe something different.

But that is simply not true. In fact- that only makes surface level relationships. There will always be a wall around what you can and can't talk about. Which will build walls that keep people out of your life unless they pass your theology and politics quiz first.

The best relationships are those that when we disagree, we talk about it, are honest... and we still go on loving and caring about each other...even if we go on disagreeing.

One of my favorite stories in the book of Acts is when Paul is talking to King Agrippa after he is arrested.

Watch this:

Acts 26:22-31

To this very day, I have had help from God, and I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would take place — 23 that the Messiah would suffer, and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles."

24 As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, "You're out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad."

25 But Paul replied, "I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I'm speaking words of truth and good judgment. 26 For the king knows about these matters, and I can speak boldly to him. For I am convinced that none of these things has escaped his notice, since this was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe."

28 Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily? "

29 "I wish before God," replied Paul, "that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am — except for these chains."

30 The king, the governor, Bernice, and those sitting with them got up, 31 and when they had left they talked with each other and said, "This man is not doing anything to deserve death or imprisonment."

Two people disagreeing, Paul trying to convert not only Agrippa...but ANYONE...and Agrippa doesn't lash out to kill him or say "Stop disrespecting me!" He just thinks he's a little crazy.

And Paul doesn't care that Agrippa thinks he's crazy...because HE SAW THE RESURRECTED JESUS!

Back to 2)

Its not disrespectful to disagree with someone or to present a claim about Jesus for people to decide about. It actually can honor them.

It is disrespectful to minimize a person or their beliefs by misrepresenting those beliefs by saying "all religions believe the same thing." they don't. And its not even close.

And its disrespectful to treat a person like they are stupid or don't really matter if they dont believe what you do.

TRANSITION: See what each of us have to decide is what the source of our belief is.

- Will it be your experience with pain and suffering that determines what you believe?
- Will it be the way a particular group of people have treated you?
- Will it be a guru who lived a good life and started a movement?
- Will it be a parent or a professor that told you what to believe?
- Will it be a need to be accepted by a group of people?
- Or will it be a humble man that claimed divinity, was killed for a crime he didn't commit, then rose from the dead igniting a movement that for millennia has broken down walls of division between people who have no business loving each other.

Like Paul said to Agrippa, **"None of this was done in a corner."**

TRANSITION: And that brings us to the last objection I will address today

- It's this. "Claiming that one religion is the only way creates divisiveness, violence, war and hate."
- Let me say- I completely agree.
- See, when you think that your way is the only to live life, to experience God, or to be "right"- it can create a level of superiority, that leads to contempt,

which has historically kept people from being friends or marrying, caused people to fly plane into buildings, and in general built up walls of division.

- The question is this: does casting off religion altogether solve that problem?
- Not if history has anything to say.
 - In the 20th century alone, Soviet Russia, Communist China, and Nazi Germany were all acts of a government determined to control religious practice in order to keep it from dividing those societies or undermining the power of its leaders.
- But this is where its helpful to look at the difference between Christianity and ANY OTHER SYSTEM OF BELIEFS. It is not in Xianity's similarities with other religions that you'll its worth, rather in its uniqueness.

3) The gospel is the most inclusive, peaceful, uniting, & loving exclusivism that exists.

Ok to show you this, lets go to another story about Peter in the book of Acts.

In **Acts 10** we are introduced to a guy named Cornelius.

- Here's the deal with Cornelius
- He is Gentile. In other words...not a Jew.
- In fact he was a Roman Soldier who was up in the ranks. He had 100 soldiers under his command.
-
- And Cornelius was famous for being a REALLY GOOD GUY.
- So an angel shows up to Cornelius and tells him **"Your good works have come up before God, and he is going to send this Jew named Peter to your house to tell you how you can be saved."**
- In the meantime, Peter is taking a nap on the roof of this house and he has this dream.
- A big sheet comes down out of heaven with all of these animals that are ceremonially unclean to the Jewish people.
- And Peter hears a voice that says "Kill and eat"
 - Now, that doesn't sound like a big deal to us, but to Peter, who is a good Jew it sounds impossible.
 - Even though Peter was now a Christian- all his life up this point he'd been a Jew and had learned from birth customs and practices that were very important to him.
- **ILLUS:** This would be similar for me if a sheet were dropped down from heaven with a bunch of Dallas Cowboys and Duke Blue Devils gear and the Lord said "Put it on and cheer!"

- That's just not what Peter was about
- So 3 times this happens and God says
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- **Acts 10:15**
- **What God has made clean, do not call impure.**
-
- Then right about the time that the dream ends... there is a knock at the door.
- It's some of Cornelius' men and they tell him this story about an angel and how they want Peter to come and tell Cornelius how to be saved....how to answer life's biggest question.
- So Peter goes to Cornelius and says this.
- **10:28**
- **"You know it's forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner, but God has shown me that I must not call any person impure or unclean.**
- **10:34-35**
- **"Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism, 35 but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him**
- **Acts 10:39-46**
- **We ourselves are witnesses of everything he did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, and yet they killed him by hanging him on a tree. 40 God raised up this man on the third day and caused him to be seen, 41 not by all the people, but by us whom God appointed as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."**
- **44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God.**
- Now 2 huge things happen right here.

- And they are both in **v 46**
 - Cornelius starts Praising God and Speaking in tongues
 - **First**, Cornelius praises God.
 - Why is that a big deal?
 - Well based on the Bible's presentation of Cornelius we would not expect him to praise God, but to praise himself.
 - Right? This guy has it together.
 - Career success...
 - Moral superiority
 - He has been praying, he's been giving away his money to charity.
 - So why in the world does an angel show up and say "you need Jesus."
 - Cornelius is already moral.
 - Cornelius is already successful.
 - Cornelius has distinguished himself as better than a lot of people
 - But the angel comes and says "You need to believe the gospel to be saved. You need Jesus. You need to believe the objective reality that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead to forgive you of sin and bring you into his family.
 - SO I'm sending you a guy that would otherwise not associate with you to tell you how to be saved."
- See, **the gospel says that your morality, or your success, your good intentions or your sincerity- none of that gets you to God.**
 - In fact, the Bible says we are all so screwed up with our own arrogant self-worship that even deeds that appear to be good are tainted.
 - It compares your best actions to a piece of toilet paper...and that's my PG version...the Bible puts it much more graphically.
- The gospel says you are incapable of doing enough good to earn God's love.
- Rather it says
- **Romans 5:6-8**
- **6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person — though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus lived the life you are incapable of living, then he died took all of your sin on himself when he died a cursed death on a cross.**

- See, whether you are good or not is a moot point. It is not your goodness that causes God to love and accept you.
- It is JESUS' good life and death in your place.
- Do you see how this cannot possibly create arrogance or hubris?
 - The gospel humbles you to the floor!
 - You have NOTHING to offer God! He offered himself to you!
 - It makes no sense for me to look down on someone because I'm a Christian.
- By saying "I'm a Christian" I am saying that God came a million miles to rescue me from myself...and my only hope of doing what I'm created to do....my only hope to worship him for eternity is that he keeps loving me."
- AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT HE PROMISES ME.

Back to 3)

- And see, that is why at the EXACT SAME TIME the gospel produces humility, it creates boldness.
- The kind of boldness you see from people who have nothing to lose.
- This is the way the Bible presents the apostle Paul.
 - You know they arrested Paul for talking about Jesus.
 - And he starts singing hymns and all the prisoners and the guards become Xians.
 - Then they say "we are going kill you" and he says "Great! Finally get to be face to face with JESUS"
 - So they say, OK, we'll let you live "and he's like, AWESOME...I got some letters I'd like to write!"
- And this is the testimony of the boldness of Christians, people that believe the gospel for millennia.
 - That's why the church is exploding in China and India where they tried to kill it.
 - That's why Dietrich Bonhoffer's and Corrie Ten Boom's books are being read and inspiring people while Hitler is used as the classic example of evil.
- See where other religions say "Do this" and you'll be accepted, the gospel says "there is nothing you can DO to be accepted by God."
- You must trust that Jesus died in your place for your sin.
- Where ALL OTHER RELIGIONS say "You obey, then you will be accepted. Xianity says "In JESUS- You are accepted, now you can obey!"
- The gospel makes no distinction. There are not good people and bad people, there is God and people.

- For those that say, **"I don't think you have to believe in Jesus to be saved. All good people can find God."**
 - You are making an exclusive claim.
 - Who is good? Who can't find God?
 - Hitler?
 - What about moral failures like me?
 - **In your attempt to be inclusive, you just left me out.**
 - **I know, you are thinking, "Oh you're fine"**
 - **But you are not me. You don't know the things I've thought.**
 -
 - Listen, what is the standard? At some point you are drawing a line and excluding someone if you make a line of good and bad.
 - Even The secularist... who says, "I'm not religious..." still have your standard for what makes a good person. You feel like it is the intelligent & honest, people who recycle or love animals.
 - What about the people that don't? Are they good? Are they bad?
 - Who makes that distinction? YOU?
 - Isn't that by your definition arrogant exclusion that will lead to division and hate?
- See, Everyone has exclusive beliefs.
- The question is which set of exclusive beliefs lead to peace, love, joy and unity.

- and that's what this last phrase in **v 46** shows us

Acts 10:46

- Where Peter sees Cornelius **speaking in tongues**.
- I know, everybody gets nervous with this phrase.
- But you know, this only happens twice in the book of Acts when someone believes the gospel.
- Once here and once in the beginning of the book. At Pentecost.
- See at Pentecost, the apostles started preaching the gospel and everybody heard the message in their own language.
- It was signifying that God accepted all races and cultures of people.
- Before then, the Jewish people believed they were special, that God specially loved and accepted them.
- See, God is showing Peter "Hey, listen up. all are welcome. I'm offering salvation to anyone who will trust my son. So Don't hate, Peter."
- Did you know that every morning a Jewish man would pray 3 things.
 - Thank you God that I'm not a woman, a slave, or a Gentile.
 - Following this event, in Acts 16, you know who hears the gospel and believes it? A woman, a slave, and a gentile.

- See, the gospel isn't only for western, white suburban, middle class Americans. And if you think that, you haven't been to Africa or China lately.
- The gospel doesn't produce division, it unites people.
 - The Greeks and Romans would not mix rich and poor. The Christians did.
 - The Jews would not mix races. Christians did.
 - The Gospel produced the most inclusive community the world had ever known.
 - It knocked down the dividing wall between people, yes, but more importantly it knocked down the dividing wall between you and God.
- That's why when Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple that separated man from the place God was said to dwell was ripped from top to bottom.
- The gospel is news. It is an announcement that everything that has kept you from loving God and other people has been dealt with on the cross.
 - And now the world can be reconciled to God...and to each other

Back to 3)

Do you believe? Right now on the app.

Conversation.

Baptism.

