

JESUS CHRIST—THE ONLY WAY!

We are still living in some very difficult times. Now we can add to the worries of COVID-19, all of our deep concerns about the murder, looting and violence that have spread like wildfire throughout our country. Responding to the killing by that police officer of an unarmed black man on the streets of Minneapolis, Franklin Graham said:

This makes me sick to my stomach. What took place Monday on a Minneapolis street, by the Minneapolis Police Department should deeply concern each and every American. It's inexcusable. To watch a police officer kill an unarmed black man—with no concern on his face, his hand in his pocket, indifferent to the bystanders begging for something to be done to help the man—is so disturbing. He and the other officers on the scene refused to listen and refused to respond. I hope they have deep regret and remorse for their actions. Police are not the judge and jury. These officers will have to stand before God and the authorities on this earth for what they have done. Thankfully, this is not the story of every police department. Most men and women who work in law enforcement are tremendous servants who put their lives on the line every day to protect their communities. We need to pray that God will give them wisdom and grace to face the storms that they encounter. I hope every police department will learn from this and make the changes needed to never let something like this happen again. Pray for George Floyd's family, loved ones, and friends, that God will put His loving arms around them and comfort them during this tragedy. _____¹

Unfortunately, the response of many people has not been prayer, but rather looting and violence. Of course—looting isn't the answer. Violence is never the answer. Pope John Paul II rightly has written: ***“Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings. Violence is a crime against humanity for it destroys the very fabric of society.”*** Violence, unfortunately, is an ingrained human trait. The writer of the Book of Genesis reflected upon this in Genesis 6:11 when he wrote that the ***“earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.”*** (NIV) Things have not changed very much over the millennia. So what is our only hope? What is our only possible way out of this mess we've created? The only answer is: ***Jesus Christ!*** The Psalmist understood that God is the only One who can save us from ourselves when he wrote: ***“Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men; protect me from men of violence.”*** Psalm 140:1 (NIV)

So in these very troubling times, we'd do well to remember what Jesus told His disciples during a particularly difficult time in which their hearts were troubled. The reason that they were feeling so

troubled was that Jesus had just told them that very soon He would be leaving them for a short time. He would be leaving to fulfill two of the most important events to occur in the history of the world—those events being *Jesus' crucifixion* and *His resurrection*. But, to encourage them, Jesus offered the following words of comfort:

¹ **“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know.”**
⁵ **Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “*I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*”** John 14:1-6 (NKJV)

This past week, I was drawn to Jesus’ declaration that He is the ***way, the truth and the life*** due to the recent passing of one of the great Christian speakers and writers of our time: ***Ravi Zacharias***. Ravi was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer in March and his condition rapidly declined until his death earlier this month. I was particularly saddened by this because Ravi Zacharias had a great influence upon my life as a Christian. Some of you may have read one or more of his many books or listened to recordings of his talks and debates in defense of the Christian faith. That’s why so many have remembered him as one of the principal contemporary defenders of the Christian faith. And boy did Ravi ever give a defense of Jesus Christ as being the only way to God to the exclusion of all other religious worldviews. Ravi understood that when Jesus stated that He is ***“the way, the truth and the life”***—that’s exactly what He meant and he defended that position so persuasively. And yet, it is a position that is fiercely rejected by the world—even in our own country.

Today, so many tend to cringe if we repeat Jesus’ teaching that He is the only way to God. Rather, people love to be told that all religions are basically the same, and they embrace such comments as the one that was once given by the Hindu religious leader, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi said: ***“My position is that all great religions are fundamentally equal.”*** And, the leaders of other religions have taken up the chorus. For instance, the Jewish rabbi, Shmuel Boteach, takes a more aggressive stance against Jesus’ claim to being the only way to God. The popular rabbi has said: ***“I am absolutely against any religion that says one faith is Superior to another. I don't see how that is anything different than spiritual racism.”*** Even our celebrities can’t seem to resist putting their two cents in. For example, Oprah Winfrey adds: ***“One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there's only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to God”***²—(or so she claims). Now these statements are rather mild compared to others. But more recently, the tone has grown much harsher from those

who are critical of Jesus' exclusive claims. And we can really see this in the comments by those who just can't stand the fact that we have re-opened our church doors to worship God even during the difficult times of this pandemic.

For example, earlier this month, an atheist psychology professor at Harvard University by the name of Steven Pinker posed the following question: ***"What's really behind Republicans wanting a swift reopening [to America]?"*** His answer: ***The evangelical Christians are to blame!*** And being an atheist, he hates any concept of the existence of God, but he is particularly critical of Christians who take Jesus' promise of eternal life seriously. He scoffs at this and insists that a ***"belief in an afterlife is a malignant delusion."***³ When people like that are entrusted with the task of educating our future leaders, it's no wonder that so many in America today no longer see Jesus as the ***sole way to eternal life***.

So, how would you respond from a biblical perspective when people make the atheist claim that there is no God? Or, what if they sing that same equally erroneous tune as Gandhi or Oprah that there are many religious paths to God? Well, first of all, we might point out to them that verse of John 14:6 where Jesus proclaimed Himself the ***way, the truth and the life!*** Then, we need to ***gently and respectfully***⁴ offer to them Jesus Christ as a substitute to their misguided way of thinking. But, having done so, how would you defend this claim? Well, let me tell you how Ravi Zacharias would defend that claim.

This is what Ravi wrote in one of his articles: ***"With the numerous religions in the world, how can Christians claim exclusivity?"***— [i.e. how can we claim that faith in Jesus is the ***only way*** to be saved?] He goes on: ***"I've always been fascinated by the fact that the Christian faith is the only one that seems to have this question [thrown at it]. The truth is that every major religion in the world claims exclusivity."*** Ravi then pointed out various teachings within Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam that are completely incompatible with other faiths, and yet they are things that each of these religions deem to be essential to their respective faiths. He goes on to say that both Hinduism and Buddhism have their uncompromising differences with ***"both claiming [their own absolute] rightness."*** Ravi then concludes by saying: ***"Islam . . . is very clearly an exclusive claim to God. A Muslim will never tell you that it doesn't matter what you believe or that all religions are true. But before we get upset with such claims, let us remember that it is the very nature of truth that presents us with this reality. Truth by definition is exclusive. Everything cannot be true. If everything is true, then nothing is false. . . Two contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense—[and the same stands true with opposing religions]. . . So where does that leave us? We must not be surprised at truth claims [as***

presented by different religious worldviews], **but we must TEST THEM before we believe them.** . . . **APPLY THE TESTS OF TRUTH TO THE PERSON AND THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST.** *You see not only His exclusivity, but also His uniqueness [as our Lord and Savior].”*⁵

So if we apply Ravi’s proposal that we test the truth of Jesus’ claim to be the ***only way to God***—how would you go about doing that? Well, let me reduce the answer down to just two words: **THE RESURRECTION**. You see, no other religious worldview from Hinduism to Buddhism to Islam, or any other religions for that matter, offers anything like it. True these other religions may have some good moral teachings like don’t murder, don’t steal, etc. And even Buddhism has a flip on the ***Golden Rule*** when Buddha states: ***“Whatever is disagreeable to yourself, do not do unto others.”***⁶ These are all good moral and ethical directives and have value, of course. But, none of these other religions deal with the principal malady that infects mankind. It’s not a sickness in the sense of something like the coronavirus. No, it is something much more deadly than that because its lethality extends to eternity. What sickness is that? ***It is the sickness of sin.*** And only Jesus Christ, through His death on the Cross and His Resurrection from the tomb, offers any solution to the sickness of sin. That is why ***He is the only way, the unique truth and the exclusive path to eternal life.*** You see, the Bible tells us that ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Romans 3:23 (NIV) And that poses a big problem for you and me—because there are consequences that come with our sins. What are those consequences? The Apostle Paul tells us that ***“the wages of sin is death”*** Romans 6:23 (NIV)—a permanent, eternal kind of death experienced in a place of great torment called Hell. Islam has no real answer to that—neither does Hinduism or Buddhism or any other religion except the Christian faith in Jesus Christ.

The prophecy of the Old Testament looked forward to the time when a Messiah would come who would provide for us a way to avoid that eternal death that we so richly deserve. The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the coming of this Messiah and the reality that through His suffering our ***sin-debt*** would be paid in full and we would be ***healed*** from the wounds of our sins. Quoting from this same Old Testament prophecy, the Apostle Peter, who personally witnessed the Resurrected Christ, confirmed the reality of what Isaiah predicted when he proclaimed: ***“Christ Himself carried our sins in His body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. [And drawing from the words of Isaiah, Peter pointed to Jesus’ suffering for us on the Cross and concluded] ‘It is by His wounds that you have been healed.’”*** 1 Peter 2:24 (TEV) When Peter made this statement, his heart was no longer troubled, for as Christ directed, he believed in God and he believed that Jesus was truly His Son as well. And because he had come to know who Jesus is, and what He did on the cross, and

thereafter how He emerged from an empty tomb—Peter grasped what Jesus meant when He said that He is the “**way, the truth and the life.**”

But was Peter correct in that assessment? Did God really raise Jesus from the dead? If so, then everything Jesus said must be true—for His very Resurrection would be indisputable confirmation by God the Father that Jesus is, indeed, His only begotten Son, that our sins are forgiven, and that no one comes to the Father except **exclusively through Jesus Christ**. On the other hand, if this story of the Resurrection is merely a myth, then we must agree with Paul when he admitted: ¹⁷ “**If Christ has not been raised, then [our] faith is useless and [we] are still guilty of [our] sins.** ¹⁸ **In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!** ¹⁹ **And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.**” 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (NLT2)

So which is it?—Are we to be pitied because there was no Resurrection? Or, is Jesus truly the only way to our salvation, as proof of His Resurrection would undeniably confirm? Ravi Zacharias said to **test the claims of religions** to see if they are true. So if we do that, how does the Resurrection hold up when we put it to the test? Is there sufficient evidence to support it? Oddly enough, it is the voice of another Harvard professor who provides the answer. But it’s a very different answer than the one recently provided by that atheist psychology professor. And as you might expect, this other professor isn’t there at Harvard today. Rather, he walked the halls of Harvard Law School where he taught over 170 years ago during a time when this country could rightly be called a **Christian nation**. His name was Simon Greenleaf. Professor Greenleaf decided that he would apply strict rules of evidence in determining whether or not the resurrection of Jesus Christ would hold up in a court of law. The more he investigated the evidence, the more he became convinced that Jesus Christ had, indeed, risen from the dead. And what was the evidence that proved most convincing? Well, Professor Greenleaf used a little psychology of his own when reviewing the behavior of the disciples following Jesus’ death. If Jesus hadn’t risen from the tomb, then Professor Greenleaf would have expected His disciples to have scattered into obscurity much as the followers of other misguided rebels had during Israel’s past history. But, what he found was that all of the disciples boldly came forward proclaiming Jesus as Lord. They pointed to their own personal witness to seeing and touching the Resurrected Jesus as being the foundation of their faith. And they held on to their faith even when it meant their own tortuous deaths.⁷

As far as we know, the only Apostle who was not killed for his faith was John—who was imprisoned on the lonely island of Patmos off the coast of modern-day Turkey. But, for those Apostles who were executed, they died in the most gruesome of ways. James, the brother of John, Matthew,

Thaddeus and Matthias were each beheaded. Peter, Andrew and Philip were crucified. Bartholomew (a/k/a Nathaniel) was flayed to pieces in Armenia. Thomas—no longer the “*doubter*”—was killed with spears in India for proclaiming the Resurrected Christ. James, the brother of Jesus, was tossed from the highest tower of the Temple in Jerusalem—and when that didn’t kill him, his assailants then beat him to death with clubs.⁸ And finally, Simon the Zealot is reported to have been hung by his feet and sawed in half.⁹ All of these disciples were killed because they insisted that Jesus is “*the way, the truth and the life*” and that no one gets to spend eternity with God except through faith in Him.

After applying the rules of evidence to these and other facts, Professor Greenleaf found that the verdict was clear. This is what he concluded: “***According to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history.***”¹⁰ This brilliant law professor, employing all his skills as a lawyer, came to the realization that it was an impossibility for Jesus’ disciples to have endured all those persecutions, pains and suffering—and ultimately their individual executions—if all they were doing was in support of a myth. Nobody would die for a myth—particularly if they knew it was a myth. But, if they had truly witnessed their Risen Lord, then there was no power of earth that could have silenced them from proclaiming Jesus Christ as being the only hope for the salvation of humanity. And yes indeed, their personal sacrifices proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is “*the way, the truth and the life!*”

And so, “***let not your hearts be troubled***” this morning by the fact that you must live with the uncertainties of COVID-19—and in a world that so readily embraces hatred, murder, looting and violence. “***Let not your hearts be troubled***” that this is a world filled with atheist professors, a host of Oprah Winfrey’s and a variety of well-meaning, but nevertheless misguided, religions. And when someone asks how you can be so bold as to claim that Jesus Christ is the only way, the unique truth the sole ticket to eternal life—well maybe you can respond by saying something like this:

I came to Him because I did not know which way to turn. I remained with Him because there is no other way I wish to turn. I came to Him longing for something I did not have. I remain with Him because I have something I will not trade. I came to Him as a stranger. I remain with Him in the most intimate of friendships. I came to Him unsure about the future. I remain with Him certain about my destiny. I came amid the thunderous cries of a culture that has [so many, many false gods and is so very filled with violence.] I remain with Him knowing that truth cannot be all-inclusive [and that Jesus Christ is the only source of lasting peace] . . . His life spells living. Your life or my life, apart from Him, spells death.¹¹

Who said that? Who else?—Ravi Zacharias, of course! And yes, we will surely miss Ravi, but we’ll carry on knowing with certainty, and proclaiming with boldness, the reality that Jesus Christ is truly

our only hope, but not only against the coronavirus, but against the deadly virus that infects Man's heart—the virus of sin that has plagued the world with hatred, murder, looting and violence. **JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY OUT OF OUR FATAL CONDITION! HE IS THE ONLY PATH OF TRUTH—THE ONLY SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE!**

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
May 31, 2020
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¹ Franklin Graham's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham>. Posted May 27, 2020, 6:37 p.m.

² All three quotes are derived from *PreachingToday.com*.

³ Michael Foust, "Belief in Heaven Is a 'Malignant Delusion' that 'Devalues Actual Lives,' Harvard Professor Says," *ChristianHeadlines.com* (May 22, 2020).

⁴ 1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (NIV)

⁵ Ravi Zacharias, "Point of Exclusion," RZIM, <https://www.rzim.org>.

⁶ The Buddha, *Udana-Varga 5.18* – 6th century B.C.

⁷ "Harvard Law Professor Puts Jesus' Resurrection on Trial," *Y-Jesus*, <https://y-jesus.com>.

⁸ Powell, Doug. *Holman Quicksource Guide to Christian Apologetics*, Holman Reference, 2006, 2010 *WORDsearch Corp.*, 277.

⁹ Wikipedia: Simon the Zealot.

¹⁰ Quora, <https://www.quora.com>.

¹¹ Zacharias, Ravi K. *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 2000.