

## **The Gospel of Christ Jesus**

### **There is no other God, Isaiah 45:21-22, Acts 4:11-12**

Isn't it nice when we can make a choice over things and pick something we really like? It is something we do all the time. One that I am sure many of us can relate to is choosing ice cream. My children love the opportunity to choose their own ice cream when we are on holiday. As there are often a wide range of choices, it can sometimes overwhelm them and they struggle to make up their mind. Inevitably they end up picking the flavour they are familiar with, the one that they know they like. My wife is often the opposite; she loves having lots of different things to choose from and picks something she hasn't had before. Often the choices we make are linked to what we enjoy, what we are comfortable with and what our preferences are. Ice cream is one choice we can make, but our lives are full of occasions where choices are made.

The title for our talk this morning states *There is no other God*. My opening remarks may seem a little out of place for this topic. I thought about it because of the fact that when people come to think of who or what their god might be, a similar thought process can occur. People tend to apply the same application of choice to God as they do with everything else, and it has been happening throughout history. If we were to consider ancient civilisations, we quickly see that there were lots of different gods to choose from. The twenty Olympian gods of ancient Greece or the Roman gods and goddesses such as Mars and Diana, are just a few of the examples. The Bible also has many examples of how keen people were to have their own god that suited them. In the book of Daniel, both the Kings Nebuchadnezzar and Darius make statements about their amazement regarding the God of Daniel, no other god was like Daniel's God. When the apostle Paul was in Athens, he preached about the Unknown God, which was labelled amongst the other gods people worshipped. All of these examples show us the tendency people have to pick a god that suits them. A choice of convenience or preference.

I would probably not go far wrong if I were to say that most people would not take these ancient gods seriously today. We live in supposedly enlightened times and such things are perhaps beneath us. We like to think that our society today is much more organised. But perhaps not. Here is a short list of some options that people have today:

- Established Religions
- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Paganism

When you consider this list, it shows that people can still pick any god that they choose and it would be acceptable to society. It may be considered odd that I have included Atheism in the list, but I base it on my dictionary definition of the word for god. The first description states *a supernatural being, who is worshipped as the controller of some part of the universe or some aspect of life in the world or is the personification of some force*. The second description offers *an image, idol or symbolic representation of such a deity*. If we consider that an atheist replaces a god being with some other ideology such as evolution or big bang theory, it falls somewhat into

that category. Clearly people still enjoy a choice when it comes to a god. The selection of one's god has been made somewhat into an ice cream selection process!

From my previous statements it becomes increasingly clear that saying *there is no other God* is not likely to be popular. Nevertheless, it is in both of the passages of Scripture we are considering today, bringing together both the Old and New Testaments with the teaching of a single God. Hopefully as we consider these verses we will see that our confidence in the Living God of the Bible is not based upon anything like our own self confidence in the brilliance of our deductions, but on the fact that we can recognise that in the Living God we find the only solution to a greater problem.

Let us look at the passage in Isaiah chapter 45 verses 21 and 22 first:

*Tell and bring forth your case; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; there is none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.*

The book of Isaiah was written when the people of God were divided into Israel and Judah. Israel was taken into captivity, by the Assyrians during the lifetime of Isaiah. The captivity of Judah, by the Babylonians took place several decades after the death of Isaiah. The passage we are considering is in the middle of a chapter which is giving a prophecy about the reign of Cyrus, the ruler of the Persians, who defeated the Babylonians. The defeat of that great nation was actually rather easy from all accounts, and it occurred almost overnight. Daniel chapter 5 verses 30 and 31 also supports this historical account. God then used Cyrus to send a group of people back to the land to form the nation of Israel again. They would go back, rebuild the walls and worship God.

This is a remarkable part of the Bible. It shows how God is in control of this world, moving and shaping things for His purposes. It is all the more remarkable because the prophecy in Isaiah is written over 200 years prior to the event taking place. It is not just a suggestion of things that would happen, but details and names given which are true and recorded in history. However, although this is truly remarkable, it is not the main thing that shows that there is no other God. In the middle of this passage, where we get so much historical data, there is an insight to the reasons behind the actions of God and a declaration of who He is.

In Isaiah 45 God is telling the people that the reason for their exile was because of their idolatry – basically, following after other gods. People preferred other gods from the nations around over their Living God. Things were in such a state that people had taken to making their own gods. A piece of wood was chopped in two, one to be a kitchen or household item, the other an idol to worship. God allowed His people to be overrun by the might of the Babylonians and taken captive. In doing this God was showing His people that the things they were worshipping could not help them in times of trouble. After years in captivity, they could again see that only He could save them. He brought them out of captivity and gave them back their land. He didn't even need a battle to do it. They were sent with the blessing of Cyrus along with all the supplies they could need. So, a mighty nation which absorbed other nations into itself for power and glory allowed a small group of Hebrew people to take supplies and resources enough to build a city and form a nation inside their land. Truly remarkable!

However, what I find more remarkable is that this was all done by God with the intention to bring His people back to Him; to save them from the idolatry that was taking them away from His care and love. He wants His people to remember all of the things that He has done for them in the past. He wanted them to remember that throughout all of the history of the world, those who have trusted in the Living God have not been let down. This is what is meant by those phrases, *declared from ancient time* and *told it from that time*. When the people of God were brought out of Egypt, they were told to speak of the things that God had done so that their children would know these wonderful things. He is speaking here of the fact that He will do it again. Only He can provide this wonderful salvation.

The last part of this passage feels like an additional message to later readers of the prophecy. It is almost like an outpouring of grace revealing the desire that God has beyond the people of Israel. The prophecy was looking at a specific time when the people of God would be brought out of captivity. But the verse includes the thought of the ends of the earth. Throughout the Old Testament we can see that God has had a care for His creation. Sojourners could join with the children of Israel. The lineage of the Lord Jesus includes a number of Gentile women brought in through God's grace. The story of Jonah is a wonderful example of God's interest in those beyond the borders of the chosen nation. And here again in our passage there is the call to everyone to be saved by God. This points us towards the ultimate plan, the mystery that was revealed through Christ Jesus, that the salvation offered by God has a much further reach in mind than the nation of Israel!

This leads us nicely to our second passage which we are considering in this talk. It is in Acts, chapter 4 verses 11 and 12, which says:

*This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

The context of this passage is around initial beginnings of the Church. Thousands had been converted in those first few days after Pentecost and the apostles were preaching with power and starting to turn the world upside down. This specific incident had seen the healing of a lame man and the preaching at the gates of the temple in Jerusalem. Peter and John were arrested and had been brought before the council. At this stage Peter had stated that this healing power had been worked through the resurrected Christ. Then this wonderful and often quoted statement was made by Peter.

This was in response to the question posed by these religious leaders as to where this power had come from. In this question, we are brought back to the thought regarding which God is it you are following. The mindset that the religious leaders had was that they knew their God but they were not sure about who Peter's God was. Peter responded by stating that there is no other God who could do this. His response is also wrapped up tightly with the thought of salvation. But the difference here is that it has brought the work of Christ Jesus into the equation. The name of Jesus is the only name that can offer salvation. Here Peter was not comparing gods or trying to claim that his was better or stronger than anyone else's. He simply stated that there were no others to choose from. This is because he saw that no other gods could save him, only his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This thought of salvation is the thing that makes the believer in Jesus so sure of there being only one God because you can't get salvation anywhere else. The work of the Lord Jesus is unique in what it offers. The Lord Jesus walked in this world over 2000 years ago, and there is a lot of evidence in history to support this. But for those who believe in what His life, death and resurrection accomplished, it is the central event in the entire history of the world. Christ Jesus came down to die in our place, take the punishment for our sins and provide us with new life so that we can be with Him in heaven for all eternity. All of this was accomplished when He gave His life at Calvary. This salvation is offered to anyone who accepts it, indeed to the ends of the earth. Peter himself had declared a similar thing before this when he stated in the Gospel of John chapter 6 verse 68:

*But Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

Peter recognised in the Lord Jesus a unique person. Our passage in Acts shows how much more he knew this to be true following the resurrection. He could boldly stand before the rulers and leaders in Jerusalem and declare the truth despite the opposition and threats that came his way. Indeed, this shows us how sure he was of its truth. Peter continued to do this for the rest of his life. Such was his confidence in the salvation of Christ Jesus. Isn't it remarkable that Peter never had this boldness because of the great miracles of Jesus? It was once the work of salvation was

completed at Calvary and Peter was redeemed that he had the boldness to declare the work of the Living God. Salvation, eternal life and forgiveness of sins is what sets Christ Jesus apart from anybody or anything else that can be offered in this world. Once this is accepted by someone then it becomes clear that there cannot be any other god.

As a slight digression I would say that this does not for one moment suggest that there are no other powers in this world. We should read the story of Moses in Egypt to be set right on this point. However, all great powers that we could come across are still subject to the Living God, and therefore salvation is still required. I give you this quote from Romans chapter 8 verses 38 and 39:

*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Going back to our topic I would imagine that many people listening or reading this may well have this opinion already. It may be that the things that have been said so far are not necessarily something that you would feel are a challenge. But we should look again at the context of the first passage in Isaiah. This statement is written to the people of God, not to those who did not know God. The reminder that there was only one God came to those who should have known. When we look at what was going on in the land at that time, they had clearly forgotten this. Therefore, I think that the Bible shows us that it is just as necessary to remind Christians of this fact as much as everyone else.

If we were to go back to the dictionary definition that I quoted earlier in the first description, it uses the words *some aspect of life*. I find this thought helpful in terms of showing how this issue of one God is relevant for us today. It points towards the idea that we can have other aspects of life which are not controlled by God. If they are not controlled by Him then we run the risk that we have allowed another *god* to take His place. In our busy lives this is so easy to do and it is a constant battle and I don't think any advice I give here will make it any easier. I will however suggest three aspects of our daily lives which I feel are more likely to cause us to forget, perhaps, that there is only one God.

The first one is conceivably the most commonly mentioned aspect when it comes to this kind of subject: that of hobbies and interests. We all have things that we enjoy doing with our free time and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with that. But we also live in an age where we have both the finances and the facilities to occupy all of our time with them. Be it sports, crafts, reading, baking, fishing, walking; our modern society enables us to fill our time and use our resources on them if we want to. As I have said, there is nothing wrong with interests and hobbies, but we should be aware how much time it is taking up in our lives and regularly challenge ourselves if it is distracting from our service for God. I have an example in my own life. I will be going to a cricket match with a friend of mine soon. There is nothing wrong with this, although some may stand in wonder that people could enjoy a whole day of cricket. Leaving that aside however, how easily we could start thinking about going to another game. We could even become members of a club so that we can get tickets more easily. Before long, we could spend every weekend in the summer going to watch the cricket.

One other aspect of hobbies and interests is the risk of anticipation for an activity or event. It is great if we have some event or target to reach for a hobby of ours. But such things can quickly be our main focus. We may be eagerly awaiting a particular date, or be saving up to get a special bit of equipment and soon our whole lives become taken up with this one particular target. All of this has the potential to take away from enjoying being those who belong to the one true God and having our lives guided by Him in all that we do.

My second aspect is one that is becoming more and more popular and it is that of causes. I remember being at university and there were societies for almost anything. This has become more mainstream and we see people becoming increasingly passionate about a particular cause. Topics such as politics, lifestyle choices, diet and the environment are all examples of causes that we can

become involved with. Again, there is nothing fundamentally wrong in thinking that a cause is worth supporting. Although, we should always ensure that any cause we choose to support is fully in line with the teachings of the Bible.

We then have to consider how much support is right to give. A cause may even be fully in line with Bible teaching. For instance, we are instructed to look after the planet in the Bible. This principle was given to Adam in the very first book, Genesis. But the trouble with a cause is that it so quickly becomes the main drive for us, even if it is a Christian cause. Let me put it this way; imagine that we were successful in a cause which meant we stopped child poverty, a truly wonderful event in the history of the world. But for all the problems solved for removing child poverty, we have not guided people to salvation and so their greatest problem remains the same. Our focus should always be on the salvation of God, and let that be our greatest cause as it remains the greatest problem the world has.

The Bible also teaches us in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 2 that we are to live quiet and peaceful lives. In effect we should be good citizens in our lives. This allows us to focus people towards the salvation of God.

My final aspect is with regard to our responsibilities. These could be anything in terms of our families, our work or just things expected of us socially. I will not say too much about these things because they are different for all individuals and specific circumstances. However, stating that something is a responsibility can be an easy excuse for not focusing on the things of God. With all responsibilities that we have, we should take them seriously, but never forget our responsibility to the salvation of God.

Anything that stops our focus on the salvation that our God offers means we are not worshipping Him as we should. Let us daily be reminded of the fact that we believe in the one true God and have the words of eternal life. Our main purpose here is to follow our God, do His will and proclaim the things we know to be true.

As I draw to a close for this talk, I would quote the words of Peter in his second epistle chapter one, verses 2, 3 and part of verse 4:

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature...*

The reminder here is that the salvation offered through Christ Jesus is truly wonderful and if we want to ensure that we don't go after other *gods* we should focus on what we have gained when we believe in His work of salvation.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on The Gospel of Christ Jesus, There is no other God, talk number T1109.

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