

Deconstruction Zone: FacePalm Jesus

May 26, 2024
Matthew 23:1-12

How did my statement that Jesus and religion, specifically Christianity, don't go together go over with you? Let me offer some examples of why I believe this.

Christianity says it's about the afterlife. Jesus said eternal life is now.

Christian belief systems emphasizes that the goal of this life is to have the right beliefs, do all the right things, act the right way, be a good Christian so you will go to heaven. **Because if you don't you will go to hell.**

For Christianity this is a transactional concept **IF** a person believes correctly and does all the right things **THEN** they will receive the reward of heaven and escape the damnation of hell.

There is also the belief that it is the responsibility of Christians and the church to SAVE the lost, people who do not believe, to SAVE THEIR SOULS from eternal damnation. Personally I was trained in several programs to do evangelism, Evangelism Explosion, Evangelism Boot Camp, F.A.I.T.H. (**Faithful, Available, Invested, Trainable, Humble**), I even co-authored a program based on where Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," it was called FISH Teams. Kinda corny isn't it?

In the teachings of Jesus he did talk about heaven, or as he called it the Kingdom of God, and says that eternity has already begun, eternal life is now. It is what we do today, we should live in the present and be about God's work today.

In Matthew 6 Jesus challenges people about worrying about their span of life and says worry doesn't extend your life even an hour. Then Jesus says, *"But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Jesus talked more about living in the kingdom of God in the here now, making "Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven," than heaven itself.

Christian belief systems tell us to petition God to bring change in the world. Jesus said have the courage to change it yourself.

Maybe you have seen the cartoon of Jesus sitting on a park bench with a guy and they are into a deep conversation. The guy asks Jesus, **"Why do you allow things like famine and hunger, homelessness, suffering, disease, war, all the bad stuff exist in the world?"** Jesus says, "Interesting that you bring that up, I was going to ask you the same question."

Thoughts and prayers is what Christianity as a religion tells us to do about the problems and issues that plague the world. God is the one who can bring true change to the world so pray to God for that change.

I'm not going to stand here and say that prayer doesn't work because some of you are literally sitting here, loved ones are still among the living, and life circumstances have changed because of prayer. Prayer works. The most effective prayer is one done in partnership with God in petition and participation. We must live into our prayers.

Some changes that people pray to God for include: A world without racism, sexism, violence, and the end of hunger and war. Yet while they are willing to pray for it, and may even send financial support they refuse to personally get involved.

Let's talk about an example from Jesus' life that we do not always talk about as sexism. When a woman was brought before him and was accused of adultery and was about to be stoned to death, **yet the man with whom she had committed adultery** was not accused and not held to account. How did Jesus handle that one?

Jesus did not say my thoughts and prayers are with this poor woman who is being abused by this male dominated system. Jesus did not pray, "God I pray you will do something about this awful and unfair situation." **No, he got involved and turned the tables** and spoke to the injustice of the situation. I have often what it was that Jesus wrote in the dust. Maybe it was the hidden offense of one of the Pharisees that stood as the woman accuser. Whatever, it was it made those powerful men to scadaddle.

May God bless everyone who see and feel the pain and injustice in the world and who put hands and feet to their prayers.

Christianity says Jesus should be worshipped. Jesus said to live the truth he taught and lived. In Matthew 6 there is story of Jesus taking Peter, James and John up on a mountain and there they witnessed Jesus meeting with Elijah and Moses. **Afterwards, as they walked down the mountain** the awestruck disciples suggested that they build three tabernacles in this special place where people could come and worship in honor of the three. **It says that Jesus was speechless.** What! Jesus speechless? Yep, that's what it says. So God spoke for him and told the disciples, "*This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!*" at which Jesus told the disciples to tell no one about that experience until after his death.

Jesus never intended to be worshipped; he was a Rabbi, and teacher and his teachings as to how to relate to God and to each other was what was important. In John 10 Jesus says, *'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'*

First things first, when Jesus says "whoever enters by me will be saved" he does not mean that spiritually or existentially, he isn't talking eternal life here. **He is speaking metaphorically,** within my pasture, within the context of my teachings you will have a full and fulfilling life. The thief, the religious, social, economic and political belief systems have been established to bring division, injustice, hatred, violence, and oppression to the world. But Jesus, was to bring life to its fullest.

The importance for Jesus was not to be worshipped but the life we have the opportunity to live within the context of our world. A life that embodies the very character, essence and presence of God which Jesus himself demonstrated while he lived.

Next week we will be celebrating Music Sunday and it will be a wonderful service as it always is. The following Sunday, June 9th I will continue talking about the differences between Jesus and Christianity and religious belief systems.

I will be talking about:

- Religion says that God is a separate supreme being. Jesus said God is the ground of all being and universal spirit.
- Jesus and Separation Theology.
- Religion says there are "us" and "them." Jesus said we are one at the deepest level.

- Religion says what matters is what Jesus did 2,000 years ago. Jesus said we are to be Jesus now.

As we get ready to go remember that if we know Jesus we know God, and Jesus only spoke the words that God gave him to speak. So in Jesus' teachings and actions we see that the character, essence and presence of God is:

- unconditional acceptance.
- perfect peace.
- total freedom.
- undeserved joy.
- continuous life.
- gentle compassion.
- unwavering goodness.
- unbroken favor.
- kindhearted forgiveness.
- breathtaking beauty.
- absolute truth.
- love.

God is bigger than Christianity or any other belief system.

Amen