Question 3 in *The God Questions* asks: “Do all roads get to heaven?” Our sermon this week is titled: “With all the religions in the world, how can I know which is right?” One of the book’s authors comments that “Narrow” is not always “Bad”. People sometimes accuse God of being cold and narrow because He has allowed only one way to get to heaven.” He recounts a personal story, of being driven to the hospital with abdominal pain. The doctor diagnosed that he had appendicitis and said he needed the appendix removed. He asked the doctor “Is there anything I can do to avoid having an operation?”, to which the doctor responded, “Not if you want to live.” Similarly, the apostle Peter, boldly declared to Jewish religious leaders that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). When asked the question “what must I do to be saved?”, Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” (Acts 16:30-31)

**GETTING STARTED:** You leave home to drive from Springwood to Bathurst for a family event that is starting in four hours. In normal conditions, that should be plenty of time. As the traffic crawls through Blackheath, you become aware that a semi-trailer crash has occurred on Mt Victoria Pass and the Highway will be closed for several hours. You also find out that there’s another traffic incident affecting westbound traffic on the Great Western Highway at Mt Lambie, west of Wallerawang. You realise that you’ll be late into Bathurst, but missing this event is not an option. What choices do you have about alternative routes to get to your destination?

**READ: JOHN 14:1-12**

In John 14:6 we read Jesus’ words: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” While there are several alternative routes from Springwood to Bathurst, Jesus claimed to be the ONLY way to God and to our heavenly home. Jesus claimed to be, to embody and to speak the truth. He claimed to be the source and giver of life.

- What do you think about these claims by Jesus? What questions and comments did you have, after listening to the sermon?

As we read John 14, we can tend to focus on verse 6. However, this passage includes other claims by Jesus that are equally controversial.

- Look through John 14:1-12 and identify – in what verses did Jesus claim that:
  - God is Jesus’ Father and Jesus is the Son (of God)
  - Jesus is preparing a dwelling place for us; he will return and take us to that place
  - If we personally know Jesus, we also personally know (and will see) God
  - Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Jesus.
  - When we listen to Jesus’ words, we are also listening to God’s words.
  - When we see Jesus works and deeds, we also see God at work.

- What would people of other faiths see as controversial, even arrogant, about these claims?

One of the challenges that the writers of *The God Questions* give to us, is to have practical conversations with people who adhere to other faiths. If we adopt a stance that “I’m right and you’re wrong”, it will quickly shut down a conversation. They suggest an “innocent awe” approach, like that of a child, where we ask open, innocent, penetrating and thought provoking-questions, that come from a place of friendship, rather than animosity. This is a great way to open up a dialogue and introduce them to Jesus.

- Many of us have friends or colleagues who adhere to other religious beliefs. Some people are very observant of their religious traditions, while others are less strict in their adherence. Many world religions have some useful insights about how to live and relate to people. One Indonesian Moslem friend has extended hospitality to my family. What things have you learnt about the faith of these people and how that outworks in their daily life?

---

An influential writer on comparative religion in the 20th century was Oxford Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics, R.C Zaehner. His fluency in many ancient and oriental languages equipped him to read and study ancient texts of Christianity (Greek), Roman Catholicism (Latin), Zoroastrianism (Avestan), Buddhism (Pali), Hinduism (Sanskrit) and Islam (Arabic). He compared and critiqued the core beliefs and practices, including mysticism. In the mid-1940's, he converted to become a Roman Catholic.

Zaehner offers this categorical analysis of the major religious affiliations: a) action-oriented, worldly (Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, Confucianism); b) contemplation-oriented, other-worldly (Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, Taoism); c) in-between (Mahayana Buddhism, neo-Confucianism, the reformed Hinduism of Gandhi, the Catholic Church)."[103]

Towards the end of his career, from 1967-1969, he presented a number of lectures in Scotland which were subsequently published under the title Concordant Discord. At a time when ecumenism stressed the need to harmonise different faiths, he highlighted that, based on his study, that that was totally unrealistic.4

"... to maintain that all religions are paths leading to the same goal, as is so frequently done today, is to maintain something that is not true. Not only on the dogmatic, but on the mystical plane, too, there is no agreement. It is then only too true that the basic principles of Eastern and Western, which in practice means Indian and Semitic, thought are, I will not say irreconcilably opposed; they are simply not starting from the same premises. The only common ground is that the function of religion is to provide release; there is no agreement at all as to what it is that man must be released from. The great religions are talking at cross purposes."[5]

➢ What do you think of Zaehner’s quote?

➢ How does the concept of ‘grace’ make Christianity different and unique from other faiths?

Over the years, theologians have asked the question: “but what happens to people who are not Christians, when they die? If they haven’t had a chance to hear the gospel, is God going to judge them?” There are four prevailing views/ responses to this question:

• The ‘Exclusivism’ model holds three truths: 1/ Jesus is the apex of revelation/truth; 2/ Christian faith is centred on proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ; 3/ salvation comes by repentance and faith in Christ’s work. No one can be saved without explicit repentance and faith.

• ‘Inclusivism’ affirms the first two of these points, but does not require people to know about Christ, to be a recipient of God’s grace. The Vatican II document Constitution on the Church asserted this view when it comes to people who had never heard the gospel.

• ‘Pluralism’ rejects all the three points held by Exclusivists. It regards all religious views as being equally true and valid.

• The ‘Postmodern’ view rejects the view that there is any one universal truth or that religious views have any similarity. All we can do, in this case, is share/ swap our opinions with each other.5

➢ Read Matt 7:13-14. What analogy did Jesus use, when explaining eternal life to his disciples?

➢ What does ‘salvation’ mean? (Consider having a different person look up each verse to read aloud:
Luke 1:77; Rom 5:9; Eph 1:13; 1 Thess 5:9; Titus 2:11; 1 Pet 1:5; 1 Pet 3:18)

➢ One important motivation for gospel witness and Christian mission is that so “everyone who believes in him (Jesus) may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16) Why is it important to proactively share our faith? Why is praying for more gospel workers also important? (Matt 9:38)

---