

CHAPTER and VERSE.

honest questions about the Bible

Part Seven: Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven? Sermon Study Guide 8|21|16 The Story Houston

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

With today's sermon we'll consider the the Bible's **exclusive claims about salvation in Jesus**. Before hearing this message, how would you have answered the question, "Is belief in Jesus the only way to heaven?"

What knowledge, evidence, or experience would you use to defend your belief?

Why is answering this question so important to The Story's mission to "inspire **non-religious Houstonians** to play their part in the story of God's love in Jesus Christ?"

Regardless of what we may *feel* about the question, for Christians, there's no getting around the fact that the Bible makes several **exclusive claims about salvation through Jesus Christ**:

- "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." - John 3:36
- "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." - Acts 4:12
- "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Jesus Christ." - 1 Tim. 2:5
- "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord." - Philippians 2:9-11

What makes claims like these so offensive and unacceptable to so many people in our secular culture?

There are two arguments most frequently used by those who say Jesus can't be the *only* way:

1. **Argument** _____. What is this argument, and how is it flawed?
2. The _____ **Fallacy**. What's the obvious problem with this argument?

As Christians, we also have to acknowledge the problem:

- If Jesus is "the only way to heaven," the logical conclusion is that the majority of people who ever lived are in hell (because they never heard of Jesus and/or because they practiced a different faith).
- It's impossible for many people to reconcile the idea that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) with the notion that God will send billions and billions of people to hell for attending the wrong religious services.
- These questions are made worse when some Christians appear flippant or seem to delight in the idea of those on the "outside" facing damnation while those on the "inside" get to go to heaven

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For me, the question "*Is Jesus the only way to heaven?*" breaks down into three sub-questions:

1. Who is Jesus?

- **Unique:** Plenty of people have started religions by claiming special knowledge. Jesus' claims about himself, esp. the idea that God came and chose to die a shameful death for the sake of the world, are unique to him.
- **Divine:** *Matthew 14:31-33, John 1:1-14, John 10:30* The New Testament writers clearly believed Jesus is God.
- **Eternal** "Before Abraham was born, I Am!" (*John 8:58*), "Jesus is the firstborn of all creation" (*Colossians 1:15*) Jesus Christ was more than a man who lived for 30+ years. He was present at creation.

What do these distinctions have to say about our question, "Is Jesus the only way to heaven?"

2. What is "the way"?

- **By grace, through faith in Jesus:** *Ephesians 2:8-9, John 14:6*
- **Evidenced by good works:** *James 2:14-17, Matthew 25:31-46*
- **"General Revelation":** *Romans 1:20, Romans 2:7, 1 John 4:7-8, James 1:17*

How do these insights inform your response to the question, "Is Jesus the only way to heaven?"

3. What is heaven (and hell)?

- **Heaven is the free gift of eternal unity with God.** (Not a reward for good behavior)
- **Heaven is a new reality, a new Kingdom.** *Philippians 3:20-21*
- **Hell is our choice, not God's.** *2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16*

Consider this: "...God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom of all people." - 1 Timothy 2:3-6

What do we mean when we say, "*The gates of hell are locked from the inside*"?

Two Things to Remember about our God:

1. God is just, and He will deal with people justly.
2. God is love, and love is always a free choice.

Arbitrary damnation of all non-Christians would be unjust. Universal salvation of all people would be unloving.

Jesus came to invite you to something good and loving and life-affirming. Even for those who never heard the name *Jesus*, He wrote His invitation on their hearts. We are all invited. And we are all free to choose.

How will you respond to the invitation of Jesus?