

Good morning brothers and sisters. It is very good to be with you this morning and I pray what I have to offer you today will encourage you to stand for the truth. I posted a quote up here by a man named Houston Smith, who wrote a book called *World Religions* probably 60 years ago at this point. In that book he makes this statement: "To claim salvation is the monopoly of any one religion is like claiming God can be found in this room and not in the next." Now Houston Smith was a little ahead of his time. He was one of the earliest proponents of what has come to be known as religious pluralism. You see Houston Smith believes that all world religions are essentially the same and are working toward the same end. That is the essence of religious pluralism, that all religions are striving for the same goal, and in that book, Houston Smith illustrated his point with something that's going to be very familiar to you. He talked about a mountain, a mountain that was representative of what all people in the world were pursuing, and at the peak was the objective. And regardless of what religion you came from, you were going up a path, but trying to essentially reach the same goal. The paths were different; the names by which those religions are known are different, but essentially we're all just pursuing the same objective.

Religious pluralism is in its most basic form, a rejection of religious exclusivism. What I mean by that is, as Houston Smith himself says, no religion has any claim to the truth to the exclusion of others. When Phil this morning in his comments at the Lord's table talked about salvation being found **only** in Jesus Christ, that is a statement of religious exclusivism. When Jesus talks about a narrow road that leads to a narrow gate and there are few who find their way to eternal life, that is an example of religious exclusivism. When Jesus in John chapter 14 verse six says "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me." He is telling us that he and he alone has the way to God, that he alone possesses the truth, that he alone can convey life to all mankind, and through him and through him alone can man have access to God. When Peter in the fourth chapter of Acts says that salvation is found in no other name but in the name of Jesus Christ, that is religious exclusivism. And religious pluralism rejects that idea. Religious pluralism is not a description of the world. It is simply a matter of reimagining the world. Because as I think you all are aware as we are going to talk about here in the slides following, there is a great deal of difference between religious systems.

There **are** some truths to pluralism. One thing that pluralism gets right is that we all do share a common starting point. All the world's religions are concerned with the question: what is wrong with the world? That is the question that has haunted theologians and philosophers down through the centuries. There is something wrong with this world and what is it? All religions begin with that basic question and what's Christianity's answer to that question? Sin, right? We've talked about it over and over this morning. In the class talking about Nahum and the condition of the Assyrian Empire and how that's an example of how God cannot tolerate sin. He puts up with it for a time in his long-suffering, but a moment comes when his cup is full, and he can no

longer take it. To the Christian, what's wrong with the world is sin. But that's not the answer that other religions give. More on that in a moment. The other thing that most religious systems share is a sense of ethics or of morals. For instance, the eight major religions of the world all have in common one moral precept: do to others as you would have them do to you. They phrase it in different ways, but essentially it boils down to that central message, and if you listen closely, very, very closely to our political leaders, to world religious leaders, you will hear that message over and over again in an endeavor to unite people that are otherwise divided by their faith.

So there are some kernels of truth to religious pluralism, but as I've already stated there is a great deal of divergence. These systems are different in radical ways. They first differ with the answer to that basic question, what is wrong with the world, and as I've already stated Christianity states that sin is what is wrong with the world. But that's not what the Buddhist says. The Buddhist says that suffering is what is wrong with the world. The follower of Confucius says that chaos is what is wrong with the world. So even though we have this common starting point, even though we have this point of beginning that we share in common, the answer that each religious system gives varies. We not only have different ideas about what is wrong, but we also have radically different doctrine in ritual, mythology, experience and law. Take for instance our view of the Scriptures. We view the word of God as God breathed, God inspired and within the content of that message, within the words themselves, we find the power, the Spirit infused power to transform a life. That's how we look at the word of God. But that's not how the Hindu views their Vedas. The Vedas they believe the words the content really have no particular power whatsoever. The power in the Vedas is found in the sound that comes as they are being recited. It's mesmerizing, hypnotic, and that they say is where the power is contained, not in the content but in the sound. Those are just a couple of examples.

We also have radically different views of God. Christians believe in a triune God, while the Hindus believe in a pantheon of gods; they're pantheists. God is in everything and everywhere. And the Buddhist doesn't even believe in God. So how is it that we can share commonality with religious systems that are so diverse and so contradictory and ultimately Houston Smith's illustration of climbing the mountain by different paths to reach the same objective, the same finish line is false because not everyone is trying to get to heaven! Buddhists don't believe in heaven; Hindus don't believe in heaven, so how can we possibly be endeavoring to reach the same point, the same goal by different paths if we don't even believe in the same thing that's at the end of the trail? As I said on that earlier slide, religious pluralism is not an attempt to describe the world. It is an attempt to reimagine it, to ignore the differences in the hopes of achieving unity among belief systems that are incompatible and radically different from one another.

There's one belief system, though, that I have deliberately left out. It's the second largest belief system in the world, by belief I mean second largest by virtue of the number of adherents, and that is the religion of Islam. Islam has an answer to that question, what's wrong with the world, and its answer is very different than the Christian answer. In his book *God Is Not One*, Stephen Prothero, a professor of religious studies

at Boston College University, offers this definition of Islam. I thought it was excellent so I'm throwing it up here for you to read. "The word Islam means submission or surrender. So as long as the path of submission and Muslims are 'submitters' who seek peace in this life and the next by surrendering themselves to the one true God. They do this first and foremost by prostrating themselves in prayer. 'Are you prostrate or are you proud?' this tradition asks. Masjid, the Arabic term for mosque, literally means the 'place of prostration' and some who surrender to this practice develop a mark on their foreheads that the Quran refers to as a 'trace of prostration.'" The answer that the Muslim faith gives to that very basic question, what is wrong with the world, is pride. They believe the problem with humanity is pride, and the answer, the solution to that problem, is submission. And it's only when the entire world, all of humanity, comes to submit to Allah that the Quran's ultimate objective is achieved.

Some of you probably recognize this building; this is the Kaaba in Mecca. It's the holiest site in the Muslim faith. This is the building toward which a faithful Muslim will pray five times a day. If they're north of the Kaaba, they'll face south. They will bow down on the ground and they will pray toward this building. The annual pilgrimage of faithful Muslims, the Hajj, one of Islam's five pillars, consists of a journey that ends at the Kaaba. Now depending upon which legend you read, and there is a great deal of discrepancy among Islamic scholars and authorities on this particular point, it is believed that Abraham and Ishmael either built or rebuilt this structure during their lifetime. What does this have to do with submission? Well, if we go over to Surah 2:128 (Surah means chapter, Ayat means verse) we have the middle of an account of Abraham and Ishmael either building or rebuilding the Kaaba in Mecca. And in the midst of their building project they offer to Allah, a prayer. I think you'll see why I've included this. "O our Lord! Make us those who submit to You! And raise from among our offspring a community of those who submit to You. Show us our rights and relent toward us. You are indeed the Relenting, the Compassionate." At the heart of this prayer is the concept of submission. O Lord help us to submit and make from us a community of people who will submit. That is the heart of Islam, submission. Pride is the problem; submission is the answer.

In Surah 11:13-14, Mohammed is given direction purportedly from Allah concerning those who might question whether or not the Quran was in fact from God or if it's been invented. Mohammed is told in Ayat 13: "Or they say: 'He has invented it!' Say: 'Then bring ten surahs like it, invented. Call [to your aid] whomsoever you can, other than Allah, if what you say be true.'" And I just want to pause and give a little bit of an explanation to this because it will help set up the next verse. What Mohammed is being directed to do is if he is faced with some sort of challenge, someone comes along and says, "You just made that book up; you just made this revelation up." Mohammed is to challenge him--" all right, you write ten surahs; make them up and we'll see which one sounds authoritative like it's from God." You see, the Muslims believe that the Quran is literally a miracle from God because Mohammed is, according to legend, was an illiterate man. Throughout the Quran, he's called the unlettered prophet, and Muslims interpret that to mean that Mohammed was not able to read or to write and I do just want to say something-- that that's open to contention as far as I'm concerned because I looked at other passages that have that Arabic word in it and it sure looks like to me that

can be interpreted other ways. Be that as it may, the Muslim looks at this passage. They see the challenge that is laid down. Alright, let's see if you can produce something like the Quran, and the Quran is the most beautiful literary work in the Arabic language, and lots of people have tried, but only one has come close. There's a book out there called *Almiqyas Alhaqiqi Il Tamyiz* translated *The True Measure of Discernment*. I've read in a couple of different places that it's basically a collection of the teachings of Jesus Christ in Arabic, and it mimics the style of the Quran so closely that when it's read in public Muslims are said to confuse it with the Quran; they'll thank the reader for reading the Quran. That's really an aside; let's get to the main point here in verse 14.

So when Mohammed is faced with the skeptics or doubters or any other Muslim, here's the answer in verse 14. "But if they do not answer [your prayer], then know that it was sent down with the knowledge of Allah; and that there is no god but Him. Will you then submit [to Islam]?" In other words, skeptic and doubter, if you cannot produce something of equal authority, of equal beauty-- if you can't do that, then the only question that matters at that moment is *will you then submit* ? As I've said, that is at the heart of Islam.

I know in the past I've wondered what the attraction of this particular religious system is. What brings people to it?--a religious system that is known for its brutality toward women, a religious system that has been antagonistic to the nations around it, a religious system that has brought forth elements in this world that are destructive. What is the appeal? Well, I believe the appeal particularly here in the West is found in this idea of submission. Stephen Prothero, who I quoted earlier, the professor from Boston College Professor of Religious Studies, in his chapter on Islam in the section in which he is writing about the Quran has this to say: "I must admit, though, that something in me found all this God-fearing refreshing. In the modern West there is so much cheap chatter about befriending God that the prospect of fearing God seems almost illicit. What German theologian Rudolf Otto once referred to as the *mysterium tremendum* has been squeezed out of divinity and with it the prophetic possibility of punishment for those who glory in injustice." Let's unpack his observation for just a moment. That Latin phrase *mysterium tremendum*, which I know I'm butchering, that means the awe-inspiring mystery. Stephen Prothero grew up in an apparently biblically-based environment. His parents were believers in God and believers in Jesus, but in his teenage years he abandoned the faith and, as far as I can tell from this book, he's given himself over to Far Eastern religions, and I don't think he has really any belief in God whatsoever. So it's interesting as you read his quotation, he's acknowledging that there is something powerful; there is a draw about the Quran, and the draw he finds is the fear and respect of God that is woven throughout the Quran. And you think to yourself, wait a second, we just studied the book of Nahum this morning. As we were reading those first few verses, I just thought how providential because here we have the awe-inspiring mystery. God, who is awesome and magnificent and powerful and terrible and just, the God who drives people to their knees. The God to whom Moses and Aaron at those key moments would fall prostrate before Him because they were so in awe of his power and his might! That's in the Bible. But as Prothero acknowledges, it has left Christianity in the West. It's been exchanged for a softer, kinder, shallower, more superficial sort of approach to

God. He's my friend. He's my buddy. No, he's your God! But in the interest of attracting numbers, Christianity in the West has made their faith fluff, but fluff does not build the church. Substance builds the church. And that's largely gone. Where is the reverence for God? So it's no wonder that we see young people going to the mosques built by Saudi Arabian money here in America. Kids that have grown up here in America are going there searching for something, searching for some answer, and finding something that resonates. It's a danger, brethren. And if we are not careful, we can sow the seeds of our own destruction.

As I close this morning, I'd like to leave you with I John chapter 2 verses 18 to 23. Thanks to Joey for reading that this morning. In that passage, John is talking about the doctrine that posed the greatest threat to the early church, the early tenants of Gnosticism. Judaizing teachers, they passed by the wayside. But Gnosticism, it gained a hold, and it overthrew the faith of people in upcoming centuries. John can see these early seeds popping up, and so he endeavors to warn brethren against them. And at the heart of Gnosticism lies this different view of Jesus as John warns beginning in verse 20: "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either. He who acknowledges the Son has the Father also." The identity of Jesus is one of the most crucial aspects to the gospel. When people begin tampering with who Jesus is, it alters the gospel. It is my personal belief, having looked into these matters, that Islam has a view of Jesus that does not accord with the New Testament. Yes, Islam offers a different answer to what's wrong with the world and that makes it distinct from Christianity, but there's more to the difference than just that, because as we will see this afternoon, the view of Jesus Christ put forward by the Quran is far different than what we have in the New Testament, and **they can't both be true** because they're incompatible with one another. They are mutually exclusive. So this afternoon as we consider this a little bit further, we're going to look at the Quran's view of Jesus and consider what it has to say, and let me just tell you, it's a lie and it is an antichrist.

If you're here this morning and you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to remind you of something that John says in the second chapter of I John, just those next two verses in verses 24 and 25. John says, "Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you. You also will abide in the Son and the Father and this is the promise that he has promised us, eternal life." That thing which we are to keep within us, that's to abide within us, is that obedience to the gospel, that belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ that he is the son of God, and if we hold to that and hold to that with all of our might, there is the promise of eternal life that awaits us. So if you're here this morning and you have not confessed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, if you want to make your faith in him known today, please, please do not wait another moment. Come forward as we stand and as we sing.