

Sermon for September 28, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

Title: "Hinduism: Climbing the Ladder"

Introduction: This fall we are working on a series of messages that have to do with World Religions. It's called, "World Religions and the Gospel Truth". Over the past two weeks we have set up our series as we talked about why we need to study the different religions of the world and how different people view religions.

If you missed either or both of these messages, the audio version is on our website ([www.bmzchurch.org](http://www.bmzchurch.org)) complete with notes and scriptures.

As Christians and as a Christian Church I believe we need to know what other people believe so that we can be in conversation with them. If we are not able to be in conversation with people of other religions, then we cannot carry out part of the core of what we believe as Christians. One of the core commands of our Lord Jesus Christ (by the way, that Lord thing means that Jesus is in charge) is that we go into all the world and make disciples for Jesus Christ, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and challenging them to learn about Christ (Matt. 28:19-20).

So, over the next few weeks we are going to talk in some depth about five (5) major world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Again, I can only go so deep in the study of each of these because of time restraints, but hopefully we will all get the gist of where these faiths come from, what they believe and how they compare to the Christian faith. I do encourage you to do deeper study of these faiths if you have time and interest. Again, I will put our faith up against any faith in the world ... BUT, I do think that we can learn some things from the faith practices of other religions.

Before we go any further, I invite you to take the blue insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today (please ignore the Matthew 12:1-12 at the top ... it really is Ephesians 2:1-10) and on the other you will see an outline of what we are going to try to cover today as we talk about the Hindu religion. My hope is that as you fill in the blanks and jot down whatever other notes that are of interest to you that these will help you in your faith journey as well as helping the people around you get to know and serve Jesus better.

Well, let's start with our Scripture for today. It should sound pretty familiar to you. We just did a series on the Book of Ephesians over the summer months and we also just read through Ephesians a week ago in your New Testament reading for the year. This is from Ephesians 2 and Paul is pretty much covering the basic beliefs of the Christian faith for the Church in Ephesus ... and for us.

### **READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10 NOW AND PRAY!**

As Paul writes this, what he's telling the people of the Church in Ephesus is: This is where we come from. This is what we believe and why. This is the origin of our faith or religion. If it weren't for Jesus being raised from the dead (v. 5), we would not have anything to share with other people ... we would not have anything to have faith in.

Let's find out where the Hindu faith came from...

## I. Hindu History and Scripture

### A. *History*

1. Hinduism developed in India ... the word Hindu actually is from the Persian name for India.
2. Most of what we know as Hinduism was passed down from the Aryan people.
3. "Aryan" = "Noble Person". Many thought that the Aryan race came from northeastern Europe and northwestern Asia, but today, many believe that the Aryans roots are in India.
4. The Aryan people were warriors, nomads and highly educated. They had well-developed theology (study of God) and culture that they took with them as they spread and moved.
5. The Aryans migrated through Iran (the name "Iran" is derived from "Aryan") and all the way up through Ireland (also named from the Aryan people).
6. We see the Aryan religious beliefs develop in Europe and their gods, myths and stories became what we know as the Greek and Roman gods and stories (Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, etc.).
7. The Aryan language eventually developed into Latin.
8. Now, in the East, especially India, the Aryan influence evolved into the Hindu gods.
9. So, if you compare the names and stories and gods, etc. one will find that the Hindu tradition is similar to that of the Greco-Roman culture. Also, the Sanskrit language (Indian/Hindu) is closely related to Latin.
10. The Aryans provided historical strands to the East and the West ... India/Hinduism in the East.

### B. *Scripture*

1. When it comes to sacred writings, the Hindus have many texts from a wide range of time periods, much like Christianity. The difference is that Hindus have many more texts than we do. Here is a brief overview of those texts:
2. 1<sup>st</sup> there are four (4) Vedic books that the Hindus believe were given directly by gods to four Vedic sages. These were passed down through generations orally until around 1200-1000 BC when they were written.
3. Next were the Upanishads. The Upanishads are commentaries or reflections by sages on the Vedic texts. These were written between 800 BC and early in the AD era.
4. Finally, the Hindu followers hold dear a book of poetry called the Mahabharata. This book describes epic battles and is the longest poetic work in history.

5. Within the Mahabharata is a small story called the Bhagavad-Gita. This is the most prominent Hindu writing. No Hindu home is considered complete without a copy of these writings.
6. The Bhagavad-Gita tells the story of Lord Krishna, a human incarnation of one of the gods, on the battlefield with Arjuna; a human being representing humanity. As they prepare for battle Arjuna has an opportunity to be in dialogue with Lord Krishna and ask deep questions: What is the meaning of life? How should we live our lives?
7. As Krishna responds, Arjuna hears about self-sacrifice and the pursuit of wisdom. Some of the things sound similar to what Jesus said. Some sound similar to our Old Testament teachings. Others don't sound like anything Christians would agree with.

## II. Beliefs of Hinduism – What do Hindus Believe?

*Again, we can only talk about a few things here ... this is certainly not an exhaustive study of what Hindus believe. I hope to give enough so that we have a flavor of what Hinduism is...*

### A. **God or Gods ... do they have A god or Multiple gods?**

1. Although there is mention of as many as 330 million gods and goddesses involved in the Hindu religion, Hindus actually speak of God as a singular God. Their scriptures speak of only one true God.
2. The Hindu word for God is *Brahman*. By this Hindus mean that God is above all and yet in all. God is so wise that for us, God is unknowable.
3. The ideal for Hindus is to be caught up in God ... bliss.
4. All life is from God and our souls are actually part of God ... God is a life force as opposed to being a personal being.
5. Now, Hindus do worship before statues of gods and offer sacrifices to each god. But the mature Hindu still considers only one God, but these icons help them see God more clearly ... like saints in the Catholic Church? They draw you closer to God?

### B. **The Human Condition**

1. When it comes to the Human Condition, Hindus believe that the human soul (God within us) longs to be reunited with God. This God within us is known as Atman. The desire is to create Atman-Brahman ... human united with God.
2. "Because God is part of us and God is perfect, we cannot be marred by sin. We simply are ignorant. We do not fully understand reality or what it really means to be human (p.39)."

3. Hinduism = we are not born sinners; because God is inside of each of us ... can't be sin there too. We just don't understand that God's spirit is in us. We are ignorant. So, the whole point of Hinduism is to gain knowledge to connect with God.

**C. Reincarnation**

1. Hindus believe that the Atman is reincarnated ... we go through a cycle of lives attempting to gain knowledge and be truly united with Brahman.
2. They believe that we start out as a simple life form and that through this cycle of deaths and reincarnations, we are eventually born as a human being (lowest caste... untouchable outcast). Then, we can start the human cycle of attempting to build up good Karma until our soul/Atman is united with Brahman ... Atman-Brahman.

**D. Dharma**

1. Hindus believe that we find salvation in spiritual knowledge. That knowledge leads us to good works. Dharma means "duty".
2. Hindus believe that they are called by God to do their duty in many different ways, BUT they have to have knowledge of what to do ... that's the tricky part.
3. Well, Hindus have access to four (4) paths created to gain knowledge that sets humans free from doing wrong. These paths are called 'yogas'. These yogas correspond to different personality types:
  - a. Jinana = for the reflective or intellectual person ... study spiritual principles.
  - b. Bhakti = for the emotionally inclined person ... doing loving things towards God and offering worship.
  - c. Raja = for the experimental type person ... these move people physically and mentally from focus on self to a focus on God.
  - d. Karma = for the active individual ... this is good deeds toward other people.
4. Hindus believe that when they follow these paths, we are reborn with an opportunity to grow again.

**E. Karma**

1. Hindus believe that we either build good Karma or bad Karma by our actions here on earth.
2. According to some scale, what you have built in this life will either cause you to move up or down in the next life. You will either be closer to the Atman-Brahman or further away...

**F. Nirvana**

1. When we finally attain all knowledge and have rid ourselves of bad Karma, we would receive salvation or “moksha”. This is a release from the cycle of death and rebirth.
2. Then one would be united with God in a state called “Nirvana”.
3. Some Hindus believe that this union is like a drop of water being swallowed up into the ocean. Others believe that you still kind of keep your identity—like a fish in that ocean.

III. Hinduism vs. Christianity

**A. The Nature of God**

1. In some ways the God of the Hindu literature is similar to the God of our Bibles ... the power of God and God’s desire to have us fully connected to Him.
2. In other ways the God of Hinduism and the God of Christianity are very different.
3. In Hinduism, God is in everything and everything created is part of God (Pantheism). But, in Judeo-Christian beliefs, God is the *Creator* and all that God creates is the *created*. We are made in God’s image, but we are not God.
4. When it comes to the soul, Hindus believe that our soul is God inside of us, whereas Christians believe that our souls are distinct from God and we are fully capable of sin. Yes, we are to invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts, but it’s different.
5. Hinduism believes that God is impersonal and most would say that only when one is close to Nirvana would they sense any sort of relationship with God. For Christians, a personal relationship with God is essential to our faith ... many sense God before they have grown in the faith at all.
6. Finally, in Hinduism, as mentioned, there is use of icons and images through which one views God. For Christians, there is no way we can make an image that would even come close to revealing who God is, so in the Ten Commandments we are told to make no images of stone or wood by which to worship God.

**B. The Human Condition and Salvation**

1. Well, let’s talk about the Human Condition and Salvation. There is a huge difference between Hinduism and Christianity here.
2. Christianity = souls human, not God. We were created in the image of God, but what comes naturally for us is to do what we know we shouldn’t do. We also fail to do what we know we should.

3. We have good in us, but we struggle with sin no matter how mature we are spiritually.
4. The answer to those struggles is not inside of us, but beyond us. We cannot forgive our own sin or make ourselves holy and/or right with God.
5. We don't need knowledge ... we need GRACE—God's forgiveness. We need a Savior!
6. Ephesians 2 = not saved by what we DO (Dharma / Karma), but only by God's GRACE. Salvation is a gift from God through what Jesus has already done on the Cross!
7. In Hinduism, the idea is to life-after-life WORK to gain Nirvana. For us, we WORK in response to what God has already DONE for us ... it's a thank you for God paying the price for our sins with His only Son's life!
8. For Christians, there is no way we can work hard enough to earn a right relationship with God ... it's too much!

**C. *What Happens When We Die***

1. Christians don't believe in reincarnation ... only die once and then we face God.
2. I have a hard time with reincarnation. I'm not sure I like the idea of coming back over and over again. I'm not sure I like the idea of not having any recollection of my past life.
3. Can you imagine coming back and having the chance of meeting people who were once your children, your siblings, nieces and nephews or friends and not even knowing them?
4. I want to explore heaven with my wife and my kids and my Dad and Mom and all my friends. Don't you just want to experience something great with the ones you love ... "You gotta see this!"
5. Byron's cabin outside of Rhinelander ... he was so excited for Sarah to see it. Are we like that when it comes to our loved ones seeing the Ultimate Paradise with the Ultimate Loving God?!?
6. Finally, I do a number of funerals as a pastor. I get to say to those people that there is hope that they will see their loved one again.
7. Not sure what I would say as a Hindu priest ... "you'll never see them again, but they've either gone up or down the ladder of karma."
8. I love what we are told by Jesus and in the Book of Revelation about Judgment Day ... Someday we will stand before God and God will ask, "What have you done to deserve my GRACE?"  
Answer: "Nothing. I did not build up good karma with you. I am saved solely by your mercy and love ... I'm here just holding onto YOUR GRACE and Forgiveness and Holiness and the work that Jesus did on that cross."
9. God's response? "Welcome, child of mine..." What will you hear?

Let's Pray

Next week: Four truths, Eight paths and more Nirvana...