

Sermon for October 19, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Genesis 12:1-9

Title: "Judaism: Jesus the Messiah?"

Introduction: Over the past few weeks we have been talking about the religions of the world and how they compare to Christianity. Why? Why take time in our Christian worship time to study the other world religions? Two answers...

One, in order to carry out the orders of our Lord Jesus Christ ("go into all the world and make disciples..."), we have to know what other people believe. If we know what other people believe it helps us to know how to start conversations and relationships that may lead to opportunities.

Two, I hope it helps us to understand that when we share our faith (and we'd better be willing to share it!) we have to be aware of who we are talking to, where they've come from and what their life experiences may be. If our foot is in our mouth all the time, it's hard to talk to people about Jesus.

There, with that said, I encourage you to go back and catch the messages you may have missed in this series (www.bmzchurch.org), read the notes and learn about the other most popular world religions. You never know when you are going to be in a conversation with people who don't understand the other major religions of the world ... rumors fly!

Alright, let's get at it! Our 4th major world religion is Judaism or the Jewish faith.

Now, when I started this series, I felt that I knew Judaism better than the other world religions simply because I already know their past, some of their teachings and some of their writings. I have spent time in seminary and on my own studying their scriptures. I have spent time in their land seeing the places that are important to them. I have donned a head covering and prayed in their temples and at the Western Wall. My great-grandfather was a full-blooded Jewish businessman in North Carolina. I know some about Judaism.

But, here's the problem. For the most part, once I get to that point in history where Jesus comes onto the scene, I don't follow Judaism much. I'm not sure I know what all a contemporary Jew believes. I've spoken to them and I know a little, but not enough to call myself educated. I'm going back to Israel in January ... I need to know more. Would you like to know more too?

Then, I invite you to take the white insert out of your program. On one side you will see our scripture for today. On the other side you will find an outline of our intended plan for approaching the religion of Judaism. My hope again today is that you will hear something or see something on the screens that will help you to understand what others believe and help clarify what you believe.

Let's start with our Scripture. This is a story of a man and his personal faith in God and God's personal relationship with a man. This is the story of Abram, later known as Abraham...

READ GENESIS 12:1-9 NOW AND PRAY!

I. History of the Jewish People

- A. This is the beginning of the faith called Judaism ... Abraham would have lived around 2000BC.
- B. Jewish people still call themselves the descendents of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Father, Son and Grandson). This is essentially the beginning of their story as the chosen children of God.
- C. God chose Abram and Sarai to be the patriarch and matriarch of God's nation and religion while they still lived in what is today, Iraq. God asked Abraham to pack up his stuff and move out ... "Where to God?" ... "You just pack, Abe, I'll show you once you get on the road."
 - 1. It took an amazing amount of faith for Abraham to move without knowing anything about where he was going, so in this Scripture we see Abraham carrying out that faith.
 - 2. But, right after this, we see Abraham and Sarah not trusting God and getting into some trouble ... save that for another time.
- D. When they are too old to have children, Abraham and Sarah have a son, Isaac, like God promised them. Isaac later has a son, Jacob, who also struggled mightily with his faith. Jacob literally and figuratively wrestled with God, so God changed Jacob's name to "Israel" (meaning: one who wrestles with God).
 - 1. Israel had twelve sons and several daughters and these twelve sons and their descendents became known as the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - 2. I would love to go further into all the stories of the Hebrew Bible ... fascinating, but, let's sum up instead...
 - 3. ...The 39 Books that you and I call the Old Testament is the Hebrew Bible and it can be told as simply as one theologian (Albert Outler) said it: "The Hebrew bible is the story of covenant-making and covenant-breaking."
 - 4. God offers the likes of Moses and David and the Israelites covenant agreements where God offers peace and prosperity and love in return for obedience, trust and faithfulness. The Israelites agree at first, but...
 - 5. ...throughout the history of the Israelite people, they keep coming up with excuses not to hold up their end of the bargain. They don't trust God. They don't obey God. They simply don't have faith! They break the covenant agreements!
 - 6. It's a vicious cycle throughout the Hebrew bible ... the people agree to be faithful to God, they decide they don't really need God, their enemies attack, the people cry out to God for help, God helps and restores the covenant or makes a new one that the people agree to and then they break it again.
 - 7. And it goes on and on and on and on...
- E. Before we think too much of ourselves, this is not just the story of the Israelites; it's our story too. How many times have we made promises

to God, just to have to go back and say, “Okay, can we please try this again?”?

- F. All of us are like Israel; we wrestle with God almost constantly.

II. Major Writings of Judaism

- A. **The Tanak** – The Hebrew Scriptures, including...
1. The *Torah* = 1st 5 Books of the Bible (Pentateuch, Books of Law, Books of Moses).
 2. The *Nevi' im* (Prophets) = writings of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Joshua, Judges, the Samuels and 1st and 2nd Kings, etc.
 3. *Ketuvim* (Writings) = Psalms, Proverbs, Job, etc.
 4. “Tanak” is a combination of the three sets of writings.
- B. **The Talmud** – This is commentary (Mishnah) on the Tanak and some sermons, teachings and stories ... over 3 million words ... compiled over several hundred years.

III. Contemporary Judaism

- A. **Three Types** – Just like there are different denominations of Christianity each with its different ways, traditions and beliefs; Judaism is the same way. In the United States there are three major divisions of Judaism (not including all forms):
1. *Orthodox* = They retain as many of the original traditions as possible utilizing the Torah and the Talmud. Judaism is God’s religion.
 2. *Conservative* = They believe that things change over time. They follow Jewish law and tradition and hold the Torah as from God. Not so much the Talmud.
 3. *Reform* = Torah is divine inspiration and the Talmud was written by human beings. We are to be inspired by the stories of the Torah, but they have let go some things like kosher food and ceremonial dress.
- B. **A Torah-True Life** = For almost all Jews, the essence of Judaism is to live a life that is decent and upright ... maybe even without following every tradition of the faith.
1. This brings about a focus on deeds.
 2. Judaism is morality and trying to be obedient to the covenant that God made with Moses and the people.
 3. As Muslims follow the saying, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet”, Judaism is bound by the words of the “Shema”...
 4. ...The Shema is a passage of Scripture that all Jews are to have on their hearts. It’s in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

5. Sound familiar? It should ... Jesus said that this is the greatest and 1st commandment (Matt. 22:38).

C. Do Jews Still Hope for a Messiah?

1. Answer = It depends on who you ask.
2. Orthodox Jew = Still pray daily for the coming of the Messiah. They believe that this person will bring peace and restore the nation. The Messiah will tear down the Muslim Dome of the Rock on the sight of the Temple. Judaism will be known world-wide as the truth of God.
3. Reform Jews = No longer looking for a literal Messiah. They believe that there will be a messianic age ... a time when peace and justice will prevail, but it will only happen through us as God's instruments. If we live as God intended, God will use us to change the world toward peace.

D. Why Most Jews Say Jesus was Not the Messiah

1. One of the questions we think of when we think of the Jewish faith, is "Why don't Jews believe that Jesus was the Messiah?"
2. Answer: If many Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, you and I wouldn't be here worshipping today!
3. It is believed that a full third of the population of Jerusalem were followers of "the Way" within 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection.
4. All but one author of the New Testament were Jewish. All the disciples were Jewish ... Jesus was Jewish!
5. Paul (a Pharisee and one who was trying to stamp out "the Way") made the connection between Jeremiah 31:31-34 (prophecy about Messiah) and what Jesus said at the Last Supper about the blood of the New Covenant. LOOK IT UP!
6. To answer the question: Many of the Orthodox Jews are still looking for a Messiah that will bring peace and prosperity politically. Jesus could not have been the Messiah because after he was gone, the Jews were still being ruled by the Romans in Jerusalem. The real Messiah would have taken over politically and restored Israel as a nation...

E. How Do Jews Atone for Sins Now?

1. Good question. Old Testament = sacrifices to God as payment for their sins. They don't do animal sacrifices anymore ... now what!?
2. Started with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (as Jesus promised would happen – Matthew 24). In AD 67 the Jews revolted against Rome starting in Jerusalem.
3. The Romans responded with their best soldiers and, as punishment for the Jews, destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70.

4. Without a temple, the Jews did not have space to offer sacrifices, so they turned to 1st Samuel 15:22 that reads, “to obey is better than sacrifice”.
5. The Jewish faith has used their obedience to the Word of God / Torah and their own writings as their way of being right with God.

IV. Jesus is the Messiah

A. Christians and Jews

1. Before we talk about where we differ, let’s remember what all we agree on as Christians and Jews ... 39 Books of the Old Testament as the story of God and God’s people interacting ... Word of God ...
2. ...God is the King of all Kings and our Shepherd. We both believe that God created all things and that we are created in God’s image.
3. We agree that the children of Israel (Jacob) are the chosen people of God.
4. Again, the essential statement of Judaism is our 1st Commandment according to Jesus ... “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all you soul and all your strength.”
5. Of course the place where we DISAGREE = Who Jesus is.
 - a. Jews = Teacher, Prophet, Rabbi; BUT, NOT the Son of God.
 - b. Christians = Messiah; the One promised by God throughout the Old Testament.

B. Why Is Jesus the Messiah?

1. Old Testament passages point to Jesus as Messiah. As Christians read the Old Testament, it takes on new meaning.
 - a. Melchizedek = Genesis 14 = told Abraham that he would make possible for all people to be blessed (Gentiles too!).
 - b. Isaiah = A prince born from the line of David ... Jesus born in line of David in David’s town.
 - c. Isaiah 53 = “Suffering Servant” ... He will be wounded for our sins and crushed because of our disobedience. Jesus beaten and put on a cross in our place! Jesus received the punishment that we deserved.
 - d. Daniel 3 = Shadrach, Mishack and Abendigo ... a fourth person in the fiery furnace that looked God-like.

- e. Ezekiel 34 = I myself will be the shepherd of the sheep. I will seek the lost. I (in person) will bring back those who've strayed, bind up the injured and give strength to the weak. Who else could that be but Jesus?!?
- f. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham 4000 years ago, that he would bless the earth with his descendents (Jesus). As Paul wrote in Galatians that Jesus was born at the right time in history ... and has blessed millions in the world because of God's perfect timing!!
- g. I believe that Jesus is the promise that God spoke about through His prophets for hundreds of years well before Jesus was born. Jesus is the Messiah!

C. An Invitation

1. I want to invite you to an understanding of the persecution of the Jewish people throughout history ... not just the Holocaust.
2. I also want to invite you to an understanding that the Israelites / Jews are STILL God's Chosen People. God does NOT break covenants!
3. It is not our place to judge others ... it is our place to love them and care about them.
4. With that said...

D. A Challenge

1. I want to challenge you to be willing to hear other people and truly care about what they think ... not just Jews.
2. AND, I want you and I to be willing to share what Jesus Christ has meant to us in our lives ... in a way that is compassionate and not "sledge hammer" or "2x4"!
3. Think about and practice ways that you have seen God impact your life through your faith in Jesus Christ. In what ways has Jesus been there for you? In what ways have you been blessed?
4. As Christians, we have way more to offer than what we usually offer. I challenge you and me to change that!

Next Week: Let's talk about Christianity ... No, Really!

Let's Pray!