

I. Intro

A. Introducing new series this week: **“Back to Basics: Conversations Around Jesus-Centered Faith from a Haven Point of View.”**

1. Some themes and topics that are covered in Blue Ocean course on Jesus-centered faith, called “Seek”.
2. Also an opportunity to process more the implications of the Haven venn diagram - a vision I’ve recently presented as a pitch on what Haven is trying to live into.

B. Format will be different than we may be used to. Short talk with time for conversation.

Handouts to help you engage. An experiment for this season; we’ll see how we feel about the results.

C. We’ll do this over next 7 weeks we’re at Washington.

II. This week’s Topic: **Why Jesus? What’s the Big deal?**

A. A few possible answers we might give:

1. **Because the Bible says so.** (Or the church)/ The Bible says Jesus is the way to God (John 14:6) or the Church says Jesus is important
 - a) why trust the Bible? or church? We live in a time when their authority can’t be assumed, and isn’t by many. Circular logic.
2. Theological answer - doctrine of **substitutionary atonement**. God’s holiness required a blood sacrifice. Jesus came to take on the wrath of God so that it would not be directed against humans.
 - a) rather monstrous picture of God. How does that jive with our understanding of the universe and our experiences of God?
3. **Christus Victor** theological answer - Satan captured humanity. Jesus is needed to win them back.
 - a) What makes Satan so strong that God couldn’t defeat him some other way?

B. Perhaps another point of view is helpful: **It’s all about connection.**

1. What if we start from what we know about human beings; that we seem to have an innate need to be socially connected.
2. Aristotle: *“Man is by nature a social animal ... Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.”*
3. This has been **verified more recently by science**. Scientists have demonstrated in multiple ways that a fundamental difference between the brains of human beings and the brains of other species is the unique ways in which the human brain is wired for social connection and cooperation. **We are made for relationship.**
4. Connection even **influences our perspective and our understanding of truth**.
 - a) perspective on beauty. My daughters think I’m totally beautiful. And I think they are. Doesn’t mean we’d ever win a beauty contest. Not about just appearance, it’s about connection. Relationship. Intimacy. That changes our perspective.
5. Some in Blue Ocean like to say we have a relational universe.
6. In the same way, perhaps when we try to answer the question, “Why Jesus” with static, objective answers, we fall short. This is ultimately a relational question that requires a relational perspective to answer it.

C. Why might Jesus make sense in a relational universe?

1. Jesus represents relationship

- a) The way Christians understand God is that God is better understood as a relationship, an active loving relationship - Trinity - Father, Son, Spirit. Jesus came to represent that loving relationship to the world, embody it in the world.

- (1) Also makes sense of why we have these relational needs and instincts. Views a creative set of loving relations creating beings that have that same need for intimacy. Theologically understood as human beings being “made in the image of God”.

2. Jesus connects through relationship.

- a) the idea is God getting intimate by coming and pursuing connection to actual human beings through actual relationship; not just sending signs like Burning Bushes or prophets. God actually coming in flesh and blood to eat, and drink wine, and touch and laugh and cry with.
- b) The people who didn't get him - weren't interested in connection. They were interested in their social structures.
- c) This is why in Blue Ocean we find Bounded Set/Centered Set a helpful metaphor
- (1) Bounded Set - shared characteristics; either in or out of a group based on these
 - (2) centered Set - more about trajectory than defined by shared characteristics.
 - (3) Project of faith community might be more helping folks arrows orient towards the center, and removing obstacles that may make some folks pathways easier than others.
 - (4) Jesus himself reinforces centered set -
- d) John 10. : ***“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice...Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full...***
- 14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”***
- e) Jesus using a metaphor: pointing to sheep and shepherds to get at something more abstract.
- (1) **Bounded set image: sheep pen.** This is what pharisees are interested in. Keeping folks safe in the religious structures.
 - (2) But **Jesus is inviting them out of that.** Story about sheep following a shepherd. The shepherd comes and he leads the sheep out of the pen. You could say he leads them out of their bounded set. And he takes them to the open places where they can graze and have, as he says, “life to the full”.
 - (3) Another interesting facet of this story is what Jesus says in verse 16. **“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will**

listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” So Jesus is leading his little flock out of the sheep pen, and then he unites them with flocks from somewhere else. Like he’s taking groups from multiple bounded sets and creating a new grouping, one flock that is not penned in but is centered around himself, the good shepherd.

- (4) **What’s the difference between being in the pen and following the shepherd?** In both parts of the story we get a sense that the sheep are vulnerable. They’re experiencing attacks. In the sheep pen, they have walls to keep them safe, to keep them in the bounds and to keep the robbers out. But ultimately these walls are not totally effective, are they? Because though there’s only one real entrance, at the gate, apparently some motivated folks are able to climb in another way, and now the thieves and robbers are inside the pen.
- (5) **When Jesus leads his sheep out into open pasture, they’re still vulnerable.** Logically, it would seem *they’re even more vulnerable*, because there are no high walls around them to keep the bad guys out. **But instead, we get a sense that actually the sheep are even more secure.** Why? **Because they’re following a shepherd who is putting himself forward to keep the sheep safe.** They’re connected to a shepherd who is protecting them and this shepherd is more effective than any wall could be. Jesus says he loves his sheep so much that he will do anything to protect them, even give his own life.

3. Jesus offers help with relationships

- a) Relationship requires us to get out of ourselves. Really see and honor another. But we struggle with this, often our own desires and selfish egos will get in the way.
- b) **Perhaps this is what the Bible understands as humans struggling with sin.**
 - (1) **“Sin” is missing the mark.** What if that’s about missing the mark in regards to how we relate to one another? Adam and Eve choosing what they wanted, and doing things on their own over trusting God’s care for them, responding through disobedience and deceit. Cain allowing his jealousy to mess up his connection to his brother, even leading to violence and murder. What if sin is about this? Not about being downbeat and judgey. About recognizing the real harm that comes when we break bonds that connect us from one another and from God.
 - (2) When I’m short with the kids: in frustration, I say things that are unloving or angry. It creates a barrier in our relationship. Makes it hard for us to have intimacy.
 - (3) If we don’t recognize the consequences of this and deal with the relational blockages, usually results in:
 - (a) Scapegoating - placing blame on others
 - (b) Stonewalling - refusing to look at the problem or deal with it. Silence, changing the subject.
 - (4) **The more we do this, the more isolated we become, almost encased in these relational wounds and cut off from others.** My friend Dave uses the image of a wall of barnacles.
 - (5) **What if this is what Jesus was doing when he came to “save us from our sins”?**
 - (a) **Jesus took our scapegoating on himself**, becoming the ultimate innocent victim to reveal the farce and powerlessness of the scapegoating endeavor; ultimately having victory over the scapegoating by rising from the dead.

(b) **Jesus modeled new ways of relating** - turning the other cheek, not returning violence with violence, embracing those who are different than us, practicing forgiveness and reconciliation, practicing restorative justice rather than eye-for-an-eye, becoming family with others who are connected to the same journey of faith - that show a better way of living as relational beings.

(6) **Jesus helps us relate to God as well** - sent his spirit to help people relate even better in his physical absence.

D. **How do other religions deal with these questions of relationship and sin?** They think of it differently.

1. **Buddhism:** non-theistic, karmic world (Samsara), through meditation you can mitigate pain and suffering and become enlightened
2. **Confucianism/Taoism** – helpful teachings on how to live life and get along, but doesn't offer the promise of spiritual power to address sin
3. **Hinduism** – karma exists, but there is no concept "sin"
4. **Islam and the scale of justice** - more about doing enough right things to outweigh the wrong, but different from dealing with the problem relationally. When I yell at my kids the fact that I've done things for them in the past doesn't make it all net better. I still need to pursue a path of reconciliation: confession, forgiveness.

E. **So do other religions miss out on the benefits Jesus brings?**

1. Agnostic on that. Other sheep. Who might those be? Elsewhere "circumcised of heart". Other branches that would be grafted in. Centered set leaves room to let that question be open, while affirming the helpfulness of Jesus in very fundamental human problems.

F. **For conversation:** What do you think of this view on "Why Jesus?" How might this view of Jesus-centered faith make for more safety? More diversity? More safety for a diverse group of people? Where are those challenged?