

What they don't know will hurt them

On January 20, 2001, Kirbyjon Caldwell of Houston, Texas prayed at the inauguration of America's 43rd president. He concluded his benediction with these words: "We respectfully submit this humble prayer in the name that's above all other names, Jesus the Christ. Let all who agree say, 'Amen.'"

His prayer drew a firestorm of opposition.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, labeled Caldwell's prayer "inappropriate and insensitive." Lynn asserted, "It was an astonishing benediction that is highly exclusionary."

Los Angeles Times columnist Alan Dershowitz also took issue. "Inaugurations are not the appropriate setting for theological proclamations of who is, and who is not, the true Messiah," he wrote. "We are a different and more religiously diverse nation than we were in years past. There are now many more Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and others who do not accept Jesus as their savior."

The New Republic joined in the fray. Describing Caldwell's words as "crushing Christological thuds," *The New Republic* contended, "After all, there are millions of Americans for whom the name that is above all other names is decidedly not the name of Jesus, the Christ."

Such responses underscore the spiritual disparity that exists in America. But they don't change the truth. Peter said of Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). He later spoke to a crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

Not Everyone Knows

Writing to the church in Corinth about food sacrificed to idols, the apostle Paul declared, "We know that an idol

is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). Later he added, "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. *But not everyone knows this*" (1 Corinthians 8:6, 7, emphasis added).

In addition to being the only Lord, Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Peter echoed this truth: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

These are powerful statements. God is the only God. Jesus is the only Lord and the only way to God. This is good news. But, Paul reminds us, *not everyone knows this*.

Those Who Don't Know, Need to Know

Many of us work, socialize, and live with people who do not know (or have not acknowledged) that God is the only God and Jesus Christ is the only Lord. Some of these people believe that living a good, moral life will one day earn them a place in Heaven. Others speak well of Jesus Christ, but place him on an equal plane with other spiritual leaders throughout history. They believe there are many routes to Heaven. Still others rely solely on the love of God (apart from any personal responsibility) to usher them into Heaven. Thoughts like these end in eternal tragedy.

God wants everyone to know that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. That's one reason he delays the final Day of Judgment. Writing about the return of the Lord, Peter reminded his readers that God "is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to

perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9, *New Living Translation*). God is still in the business of "bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). Every day the return of Christ is delayed is another opportunity for sinners to repent and turn to God.

Tell Them

Before ascending into Heaven, Jesus gave his followers these marching orders: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). He also said, "You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

If Jesus Christ is the only Lord and the only way to God, then we had better start telling people.

Ungodly people often make us angry. We get incensed when leaders in the scientific community reject the role of God in the origin of life. We cringe when public leaders and policy makers push agendas that conflict with our Christian principles. We get irate when entertainers appear on talk shows and discuss every conceivable path to salvation except the one true path. We fume when people in our own communities live lives that openly and arrogantly defy the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Yes, ungodly people make us angry. Even so, we cannot allow our anger to overshadow our compassion. People who reject Jesus Christ—for any reason—are lost. They are pawns in the hand of Satan. They are to be genuinely pitied.

Though they don't know him as Lord and Savior, "Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Someone needs to tell them.

Will you? ■



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