

Religion Blinds Us To Gods Purposes

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 1985

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] religion, where it comes from and how it works. And I talked about the first night I wanted to try and...

When Jesus says in John 8, You continue in my word, you will be my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

It's a tremendous statement. And I imagine you could live a long time on the sustenance that such a statement would give you if you were to follow it through.

That somehow the whole function of religion is that you should know the truth, and the truth should make you free.

One of the things I think it should make you free of is religion. And I can't make out quite what that means, but I've always been impressed with a New Testament professor that I had when I was at university who quoted all sorts of authorities for saying that religion is the greatest enemy of the gospel.

[1 : 25] And somehow religion messes up everything. Well, last week I tried to get close to what it means to be a Jew. And it's extremely difficult, isn't it?

Because we have so much in common religiously. What could it possibly mean to be a Jew? And as preachers have to do, they have to come to some conclusion.

So I suggested for your meditation the possibility that you would consider that you do seem to be very conscious of having suffered for God.

Christians seem to be very conscious of having suffered for men. I don't know where your meditation is going on that.

But then I decided I would cover the whole of Islam this week. And I have found it hopelessly.

[2 : 33] I just don't know where to go or where to turn. It's such a huge problem the more you read about it. And the more you seek to understand what kind of motivation is involved.

And an interesting thing happened was that I read several books. I mean, parts of several books I read.

But I read several about Mohammedanism, Islam. And how it misses the point from a Christian point of view.

And I read a book of yesterday morning's Globe and Mail, which ricked my balloon very badly. It described a book about the Arabs today.

I don't know if any of you have read it. But I read it. And the byline on it was apparently, I would think from his name, that he must have been a Muslim. He wrote about the Arabs today.

[3 : 41] Not in terms of their fighting and their rebellion and their revolution and all the headline stuff you get on the Arabs. But in terms of their domestic life, their care for one another, their hospitality, their charm, their grace.

All the good things about them are all in this book. And it concludes with a description of the confrontation between the Arab world and the Western world in Egypt, where 10,000 Westerners live.

And it described the effect of Western society on this Arab country and the fact that the Arab country has not tried to maintain Muslim standards.

And the effect of the effect of the effect of the effect of the effect of the rock music, the technology of the West, the hard liquor in abundance which Westerners drink, and the very sophisticated prostitution which goes on wherever there is a Western enclave.

And this book review in the book review in the globe and mail concluded that there's probably some wisdom to the slogan which moved the Arab in the early days of the India takeover.

[5 : 14] And they say, the East is East and West, but Islam is West.

And that it's a kind of an appeal that the East, which is perhaps marked by communism. The West, which is marked by capitalism, needs to be an alternative.

That alternative is in Islam. If you try and examine what Islam is all about, it's extremely different from how you sort it out.

But I heard that last night that there is a local professor who has just completed as a major life's work of the importance of the Quran.

And that's had a tremendous unifying effect.

[6 : 34] And there is no breakdown between church and state in Islam. It's the same thing. That's why they can pray and fight with equal zeal because these two things are so interwoven.

But you're doing so. And you're not filthy because you're crazy.

You're not mentally weak-backs. All the Thinkwords that go to the MacEnter.

Six or seven feet. It's an oval stone. Six or seven feet across. And it's in a holy of holy places in Mecca.

And that Muhammad said that it was given by one of the eight groups to Abraham. And it predates the formation of Muhammadism. But it still continues to be a certain holy shrine around which geographically it beats the whole of Islam's ordinance.

[7 : 58] So you turn away, I think, with a sense of being heart sick because man's religions are so varied. He's looking for the truth. But where does he find it?

He wants to be free. But what is free? He wants some focus and center to his faith. But where is it? He wants something to rally around. But what does it mean?

I was equally struck. And I've been asked by at least one or two of your members if we could discuss this in the coffee hour.

I would be glad to accept the truth. We know our DNA can come to coffee. But if you were to come, we might discuss this out.

That phenomenon I call live gay yesterday with 1.6 billion people. Now, again, I tend to think of it. And this is why I'd like you to tell me what you think of it.

[9 : 17] But I tend to think of it as a profoundly religious activity that all the people caught up in were doing a lot of God talk all the way through it.

Because they recognized certain things. If you look at it, there was a... Well, I don't want to prejudice you. I do want to prejudice your mind.

It's a church, right? But I really want you to retaliate in the coffee hour. I thought of it in terms of the great golden image in Daniel chapter 3.

Seventy-two million dollars of gold. Wow. So high that you could hardly imagine. And the sound of the music. Everybody has to bow down and worship.

And so that there you had the sound of the music. 1.6 million people supposedly bowing down and worshiped.

[10 : 28] It was a great experience, I'm sure, of our common humanity. It was a great experience of the brotherhood of man.

It was a great experience of a kind of universal ecstasy.

This man, for a change, did something really good. He tried to solve a problem of an international kind. Without the Terry War, which is about the only way we can solve problems internationally in our society.

So there are those things about it that seem to me to be very impressive. There's another, well, the fact that they emphasized that people in Russia, people in Japan, people in every continent in the world were watching this phenomenal continent.

And, you know, I wondered if they were doing simultaneous translations into a thousand languages as they went. And, uh, it must have been a cold time.

[11 : 45] Bob Dylan didn't get to me. If I was to speak my mind, I would think he was a bitter, bad tempered old man. He'll grumble and send his beer.

But, uh, there may be other views of him. But that somehow the intensity of the ecstasy of being hammering away at a guitar and making noises that nobody can quite decide because they're all running together in a way.

And nobody can quite tell what language you're talking anyway. You know, and that somehow everybody heard that. And, uh, everybody, uh, understood that perhaps in their own language.

I don't know. They, they, the, uh, it may be the universal language of man that they can, they can understand rock music. And it may be, you know, that, that instead of looking at a historical religion like Mohammedism, you, uh, you are, uh, you should look at some of the almost, uh, spontaneous religious expressions that are coming in our society.

Because it was utterly spontaneous. Nobody will keep the documents, I presume. Nobody will even keep the tapes, probably. But, uh, but, uh, there it is.

[13 : 08] It's a kind of great, uh, absolutely spontaneous religious occasion that suddenly caught people up in great religious aspirations of one kind and another.

It's a kind of, uh, that's why I, I'd like, I'd like to talk to, to you about it. Because, uh, it's a, a strange and wonderful phenomenon.

And, uh, brought a great many people, gave them some common ground at least. Uh, it's not a religion whose leadership is dependent on it.

It's not a religion that was born yesterday that we get here, uh, you know, the experience, I'm sure.

But I think it was a phenomenal thing ever the last time. And I think it may be as close as, in a sense, our society could get to the religion.

[14 : 16] And, um, the fact that it was motivated by a concern for our fellow men, a concern for our brothers in Africa, a concern for the poor and the hungry.

Um, can be insignificant. But I still need to know how to interpret it. And I would, I would be grateful to become a coffee or a healthy.

Um, anyway, I, I'm telling you that because I, I'm caught with this business of religion which I, which I, uh, I don't know what to do with it.

And as I, there was another article and, uh, came very close to, to the heart yesterday in the Saturday Globe and Mail.

It's described the village churches of England from 800, 900 years of England. How worship has gone in and on in those churches century after century.

[15 : 20] And, uh, what the article said in the report that's just been published is that they're not going to last. The reason they're not going to last is that the people simply don't believe it.

And that where they were living for a, they were surviving on sort of 17% uh, uh, uh, nominal attachment to the local church.

That, that, that percentage has dropped so drastically that there isn't anybody to maintain that kind of, of, uh, religion anymore. And, uh, what, what does that mean?

So, most of you are here tonight, I suppose, because you are in some sense a bit religious. And, uh, and I want just to talk to you, and I, I realize I've used it all my time with the, uh, introduction to my sermon tonight.

But I'll, I'll go on for a few minutes more to go over the passage of Scripture that I, that I want you to, to, uh, think about as a kind of picture of what religion is all about.

[16 : 30] In a very simple and kind of pure form. And that's the first chapter of the first book of Samuel. And you get that lovely story.

Somehow, out of all that was happening in the whole of the world, there was a certain man. An individual. An historically identifiable individual.

An individual. A geographically identifiable individual. Because he lived in a village. The name of which you'll have to check with Trish Torrey for. She's the only person I know who can pronounce it.

But, that was where it was centered geographically. And, uh, so you see this certain man. You see his place geographically. And then you see what's always been important.

Uh, five generations of people that come down to El Cana. And then you have El Cana had two wives.

[17 : 33] One of the really lovely things about Scripture. Is that by and large, throughout, it teaches monogamy. And, uh, but then without a bat of an eyelash, he picks one of the great Old Testament saints and says, El Cana had two wives.

What are you supposed to do with that? You know? Actually, it's really very comforting. Because that's the way life works. Life doesn't seem to work according to rules.

And, uh, El Cana has two wives. And, uh, without saying anything against it, it demonstrates the problem that that creates. Uh, and it created it each year when he went up to, uh, Shiloh to worship.

And, uh, see here was this village. And, probably not many miles away was the center of worship. And, uh, in the center of worship was the Ark of the Covenant.

Because people need that kind of focus for their worship. Um, and so, look at the way this church is designed.

[18 : 45] You see how highly focused it is. And that's so instinctive to man to create that kind of focus. It was a focus in Shiloh. And, uh, so the life of this man and his two wives and the children of one of them would go up annually to worship at the temple in Shiloh.

And at the temple in Shiloh was the Ark of the Covenant. And the Ark of the Covenant marked the presence of God geographically in the midst of the nation. And people went up there to worship.

So, that's, that's religion. You know the, uh, and I'm sure some of you were wise enough to be able to tell me where this comes from. But the, the idea that, that religion is not the gradually building up from a polytheism towards a higher and higher form of religion until you come to, uh, the exalted monotheisms of the, of, of the religion of Mohammedanism, Judaism, Christianity.

But that, uh, man started worshiping one God. It's broken down and down and down and down. And that's in history.

That's how history is worth. Well, they came up to worship the Lord of hosts. The God who was active and powerful.

[20 : 15] And, uh, at the temple at Shiloh was Eli, the priest, and he had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

And, uh, they were charlatans. You have to just read on a little further. And so you find that the institutional reality of religion was corrupt then.

Yes, probably it is corrupt now and always is corrupt. I don't, it seems historically that institutional religion is so subject to corruption.

And that the reality of this religion was a man like Elkanah who and his family came up year by year to worship in Shiloh.

When he came up and worshiped, worship culminated in a feast. And the feast was, uh, was a great time of pleasure. And, uh, he gave portions to his two wives.

[21 : 15] He took a nine-nine portion for each of her children and one portion to Hannah because she had no children. And, uh, you will see what, uh, is probably the implicit warning against anything but monogamy.

And that is that the two wives didn't get along very well. And, uh, so, uh, there you have this picture of Hannah weeping and unable to eat and, uh, humiliating.

And the husband coming, trying to comfort her and saying, am I not more to you than ten sons? It was obviously, uh, a love of a deep devotion.

And how do you damage his wife? And, uh, so after they had eaten and drunk, uh, Hannah went into the temple and there she, in deep distress, prayed to the Lord.

And the Lord wept bitterly. You see, I, I, I think, I think we are hopelessly religious. That's the problem.

[22 : 31] Um, and our religion tends to center around marriage. It tends to center around the birth of children. It tends to center around illness. It tends to center around death.

Death tends to center around seasons of the year. Uh, all those. We somehow need some frame, some religious frame of reference within which to see those things.

Those human events. And our society here in Vancouver is having a hard time because it, it somehow can't do that. And yet it, it can't escape it either.

And so, there's a lot of ambivalence in our culture about, about religion. But somehow we want to declare that we're free of it. I'm thinking of secular Vancouver in its hedonistic and materialistic way and secular way of life.

Somehow we want to be rid of it and somehow it keeps intruding itself. And the birth of a child and death and marriage and illness and, and tragedy seem to force us to find some frame of reference in which to understand all those things.

[23 : 46] And, uh, and so it was that, that, uh, Hannah wanted to understand this. And she went into the temple and there she prayed and her mouth mouthed the words but no sound came out.

And, uh, she prayed earnestly that, uh, well, verse 11, O Lord of Hosts. If thou would indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant and remember me and not forget thy maidservant.

And will give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life. And no razor shall touch his head.

The intense personal agony of a barren wife leads to this prayer.

And, uh, and, uh, I, I guess that I don't see what, what you can do, but I don't see how you can get through life without coming to such a moment of intensity when you know that the answer has got to be outside of yourself.

[25 : 03] And you don't know where it's going to come from. And you're caught in a system of, of institutional religion that doesn't understand you particularly well.

Because the old priest, Eli, observed her mouth and thought she was drunk. And then she was drunk, which is a great symbol of the fact that clergymen are always fairly cynical about the motives of the congregation.

Uh, I, uh, don't like to confess that, but it's, uh, it's part of human nature that that happens. And so she, uh, uh, uh, Eli said to her, she was, uh, how long will you be drunk?

And put away your wine from me. And he didn't understand the, the tremendous agony of heart out of which Hannah was speaking.

And, uh, she said, no, I'm not drunk. And explained the situation to him. And prayed to him. And God seemed to use him because God used Eli as the mouthpiece through which the promise of answered prayer it was given to, to Hannah.

[26 : 28] Prayer wasn't answered when Samuel was born. Prayer was answered when Hannah prayed. And, uh, Eli says, go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your condition that you have made to him.

And she said, let your maidservant find favor in your eyes. And the woman went away and ate, and her countenance was no longer sad. It's a, it's a, it's a powerful picture.

And, uh, that's, that's a powerful picture. So here you have all this. And, and in verse 19, they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord. I'd love to know what that meant.

I'd love to know how that took place. the place. Then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Hannah conceived, and in due time she bore a child, and she called his name Samuel. And she said, I have asked him from the Lord, and the Lord has given. Then you have the story of how Elkanah the next year went up to offer to the Lord in yearly sacrifice to pay his vow. That whole basic thing of man coming and offering himself before the Lord and deferring not to pay the vow that he's made to the Lord. Elkanah is undoubtedly a saint of the Old Testament. Hannah did not go up. She didn't go up because she wasn't going to go up until the baby was weaned.

And I'm told that babies were weaned at two or three years of age. And only subsequently did she go up and appear before the Lord in Shiloh. And took up with them a three-year-old bull. Eve a flower in the skin of one. I've spent long enough on the farm to wonder how they ever got a three-year-old bull to travel with them. But it's a kind of graphic part of the story which I wouldn't want you to miss. And it gives a sort of earthy dimension to this journey up to Shiloh. And they slew the bull. And it was a very rich offering that they made. And Hannah says, for this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition which

[29 : 08] I made. Therefore I have lent them to the Lord as long as he lives. He has lent to the Lord. The chapter is that they worship the Lord. Yeah. Well, all of that is such a lovely, simple picture in the sense of man's relationship to God, of man's religion, of man coming. And in an order, annual, annual family way, of worshipping the Lord. You see, what comes out of that is, and that Hannah knew nothing about, and Elkanah knew nothing about, and Beninah knew nothing about, and Phineas and Hophni knew nothing about, and Eli knew nothing about, was that in that very sort of miniature little family drama. God was working out an eternal purpose. And the raising up of the man who was the first prophet since Moses. The man who was to lead the nation. The man who was to lead and anoint the first king.

teamwork, and who was to be king Bruce made anoint the third ■■■■■.

to Shiloh, the Ark of the Covenant, the agony of the marriage, the breakdown between the two women, the love which Elkanah had for Hannah, in all that mix of, in a sense, realities of human life which cannot be understood apart from the eternal purpose of a God who has committed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

This is somehow such a powerful picture of that. And we go on in our worship day by day, reading these ancient scriptures.

Shiloh is reckoned archaeologically to have been destroyed over 3,000 years ago. So that it wasn't there after that time in history.

[31 : 56] So this goes back a long way into history. In this, the historical and eternal purposes of God begin to unfold towards the great unfolding of the purpose of God in Jesus Christ.

And if religion somehow blinds us to the eternal purpose of God, if religion is just Hannah praying for a son, if that's all, if it's just the jealousy between two women trying to be resolved, if it's just the annual cycle of prayer, if it's just meaningless, empty worship, all those things are so useless in and of themselves.

And so much of what our religious life is seems so useless in and of itself, apart from the awareness of the Lord God of hosts, working out in the circumstances of our little lives his eternal purposes.

It's hard, isn't it? I think we have to go beyond famine in Africa.

Christ the Lord. Beyond Judaism. Christ the Lord. Beyond Islam. Christ the Lord.

[33 : 43] Beyond institutional religion. Through Christ the Lord. Somehow we have to come to acknowledge him as Lord in our world.

To serve him. To see that while we seem to be stuck with religion as the means of relating to that transcendent reality.

That transcendent reality itself. It's got to be related to the ultimate reality of the purpose of God.

And that purpose of God came into focus of Jesus Christ. And I think Christianity as a religion as a religion as a religion as a religion as a religion as a religion as a religion as a religion as a religion.

And I think all the other world's religions have to be brought back to that reality. Back to that reality. Back to that reality. Back to that reality. Back to that reality.

[34 : 46] Back to the place where 1 Samuel 1 ends. And they worship the Lord. And that is the Lord God of Sabaoth.

And the Lord God of Paul. And that is the Master of about A Tower of Sabrina.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[37 : 25] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[40 : 01] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.