

## Week 33 – Tough Questions – Are Mormonism and Christianity the Same Thing?

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church, coming at you from the corner of State Street and Northridge Drive in Florence in North Omaha. I'm going to do a little different location today because of the topic we're going to pick.

The question I want to deal with today has to do with true prophets versus false prophets. We're sitting out in front of the visitor center of the Mormon Trail Historic Winter Quarters. I'll come back as to why we're shooting at this location in a minute. But listen to a reading here from August 11<sup>th</sup> – earlier in your Project 4:4 reading just this past week.

*"Then I said to the priests and all the people, this is what the Lord says. Do not listen to the prophets who say very soon now the articles from the Lord's house will be brought back from Babylon. They are prophesying lies to you."*

There's a contest here between a true prophet of the Lord, Jeremiah and a false prophet of the Lord, named Hananiah. Jeremiah goes on to say that all of these articles that are going to be taken out of the temple, they are going to be taken to Babylon where they will remain until the day I come for them, declares the Lord. Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.

Some of the prophets in Jeremiah's day were giving a very tempting, seductive message that the exile itself would be very short lived and that in just a matter of a couple of years, everything is going to come back and be set back to normal in the city of Jerusalem. But Jeremiah knows better because he's a true prophet of the Lord.

Here's a little more reading from August 12<sup>th</sup>. *"Then the prophet, Jeremiah, said to Hananiah, the prophet – listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you. Yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the Lord says, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year, you are going to die because you have preached rebellion against the Lord."*

Now Jeremiah and Hananiah had their contest here in the fifth month of the year. The text goes on to read that in the seventh month of that same year, two months' later, Hananiah, the prophet, died.

Here are a few other things as you go on to read your Project 4:4 reading. *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: Do not listen to what the false prophets are prophesying to you. They fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds – not from the mouth of the Lord."*

OK, so are you ready for our tough question for the day? The question is this: Is Mormonism the same thing as Christianity? Well, if we looked at it through the experience of Jeremiah and his contest with Hananiah and if we look at it through a

careful study of what Mormons believe, what they teach and we look at it through the life of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, the founders of Mormonism, we'd have to say resoundingly – no way! Christianity and Mormonism are not the same thing.

This location here in north Omaha is called the Winter Quarters. It's where the Mormons were traveling from Illinois where they were expelled to Salt Lake City, Utah where they were going to eventually build their city. It was called according to Mormon theologians – the Great Exodus. The great exodus left from Nouveau, Illinois and landed here in North Omaha. The year was 1846 and about 3,000 travelers, Latter Day Saints, stopped here and encamped in this very area of North Omaha. There were probably about 3,500 Latter Day Saints at that point in time. They built over 700 dwellings to live here. They stayed here especially in the winter of 1846, but some of them also stayed in 1847.

Well, there are several facts about Mormonism that just do not square with Christianity in any way, shape or form. If you remember the story about Mormonism – it's founded by a guy named Joseph Smith. When Joseph Smith is 14 years old, he begins to notice the denominationalism that surrounds him. He lives in Palmyra, NY at the time and Palmyra, NY was the hotbed of religious pluralism of the day. So he was disturbed by all the fighting between the denominations – the Presbyterians, the Baptists and the Congregationalists and he begins to wonder what is the truth?

So when he's 17 years old, he goes out in the woods and he has this encounter with the angel Moroni – or so he claims. And when he comes back, he's convinced that the angel Moroni has tapped him to be the man to translate this Book of Mormon from whatever heavenly language it was originally written in – into English so that everybody in the Americas could read it. And Moroni, the angel, told Joseph Smith this is all written down on these gold plates and you have to wear these special spectacles to read it and translate it, and I want you to sequester yourself and translate it just bit by bit. So then by 1830, the document that we call the Book of Mormon was published. And Joseph Smith was a mere 24 years old at the time.

Well, if we look at Joseph Smith and what he did and what he said and how people absorbed his message and we compare that with what's taking place in the Book of Jeremiah in the day of Jeremiah, we'd have to say that Jeremiah is a true prophet of the Lord and Hananiah is a sort of Joseph Smith, if you will. Filling people with visions of their own concoctions. When people make up stuff or when people have ecstatic experiences and they elaborate on it and then begin to build theology around it and begin to write religious documents, we have to be very suspect of that. Just like in Jeremiah's day, what one prophet says, should line up with what another prophet says if they are both true prophets of the Lord.

So if Joseph Smith is a false prophet after all, it would seem that we would be able to take his teachings and compare those with the Bible. If he's not on track with

what he thinks and what's been revealed to him, then it will show itself in his theology.

Well, here are just nine really quick theological plunders that I think tell us that Christianity and Mormonism are not at all the same thing. I'm just going to rip through them real quick. I owe it to you to tell you this, and you ought to really research it yourself.

### Non-Christian Mormon Beliefs

1. First of all, the Bible that Christians read according to Joseph Smith and Mormonism is not the true message of God. It's been corrupted – true faith has been somehow lost over the years and, of course, who's the rescuer of the situation? – Joseph Smith. He comes along and gives us a Bible that's reliable through the Book of Mormon.
2. God used to be a mere man who transcended his humanity and became deity. Well, that's nothing at all like what we have in the Christian Bible. God has always eternally existed as a trinity, has always been God – never became God at any point in time in the past.
3. People, in fact, can become Gods. So that's one of the hopes that's held out to you as Mormon believer. That if you do your job as a good Mormon, someday in the celestial city, you'll be able to be a god, have a goddess, and have celestial sex and make all kinds of spirit babies for eternity future. Sounds great!
4. Then in terms of the trinity that Christianity teaches, Mormonism says that these are three separate gods. They're not one God expressing itself in three persons as Christianity had taught for centuries and centuries before Joseph Smith ever came along.
5. Then Jesus, Jesus himself was never really an eternally existing deity. He was not really one with God, God himself. There's no such thing as pre-incarnate Jesus like Christianity teaches in Mormonism.
6. Jesus and Satan were both originally spirit children. So Jesus had a finite beginning. So this cuts against the grain of the Bible's teaching of Jesus being fully God and fully man. Christianity and Mormonism are not at all compatible on Christology.
7. No salvation outside the Mormon Church (Mormon Doctrine p. 192) – look it up yourself. You have to enter through the Mormon path in order to reach God and be with God someday in paradise.
8. Three levels to heaven depending on your human achievement. There's the terrestrial heaven, the celestial heaven and the telestial heaven – so depending on how good you are and how much you achieve, if you find yourself in a lower level of heaven, you can just work your way into upper levels of heaven. A very works righteousness or works-based faith. Again – not at all like Christianity.
9. Then the last point that I'll take a minute to point out is Mormonism is based entirely on human effort. Yes, maybe there's God's grace, but God's grace comes at the end of completely exhausting your human effort in order to

get to God. Not faith based on grace, based on our relationship with Jesus and our belief in him.

So with so much at stake in what Joseph Smith had revealed to him by the angel Moroni it would seem like we've got to take this more seriously than we do today. I know that given our popular election coming up later in the fall, we have one presidential candidate who is a Mormon. So for some people, that's a little unsettling. They'd like to know, well am I voting for someone who's a Christian if I'm a Christian. We'll have some painful choices to make about what our priorities are this next election cycle.

But I just want to be emphatic about this. Just like in the days of Jeremiah, there's was a broad distinction drawn between Jeremiah and Hananiah. With specific differences, Hananiah thought that he was revealing the will of the Lord based on his human imagination and Jeremiah came along and said, "No, Hananiah, you're dead wrong." And if the consequences were that big back then between two prophets of Israel, how much more are they now between two prophets of spirituality – Joseph Smith on the one hand and scripture and Jesus and the Christian Bible on the other.

Well, if you have something that you want to chat about, hit on the response down there and let's dialogue about it. This has been Tim Perry, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church. Thanks for joining us.