

## Highway 23

I grew up about 3 kilometers from Highway 23, just to the east of a small village. For those who live in the Nobleford area, you might wonder how that could be. I grew up in Ontario, and there is a Highway 23 there as well, and it is about as busy as our Highway 23.

When I say “Highway 23” that means something completely different to people from Nobleford than it does to people from Atwood, the small village I named as home. While they have the same name, they are different roads, and to think that they are the same would be to make a big mistake. You cannot get to Atwood from the Alberta Highway 23.

Some years ago, I took a course on Islam, and one of the questions that was asked was this: is Allah the same God as the Lord, the Christian God. People have made the claim that Jews, Muslims, and Christians all worship the same God, although we understand him differently. After all, both Christianity and Islam have their roots in Judaism. Islam, further, recognizes that Jesus lived on this earth, and they claim that he was a great religious leader. Muslims respect Jesus, although they believe that he was not God’s final revelation, but they believe that Mohammed had the final and greatest revelation from God and that all what he says supersedes everything that came before. Because these three religions have the same roots, many have claimed that these three religions speak of the same God.

But there is a problem. When I say that I grew up near Highway 23, I mean a very different thing than what you might hear me saying. To say that the highways are the same would be misleading. While there are many similarities, to say that they are the same thing would lead to all sorts of problems. Atwood, which is located about 40 km from the north end of Highway 23 is not where we would expect it to be should we travel south and east of High River. And we would not be able to find Vulcan on the Ontario Highway 23. While we might use the same name for different roads, that does not make them the same road. Similarly, even while Allah and the Lord are both referred to as God, they are not the same God.

We might find a parallel between Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christians. All three religions speak about Jesus, and if you would listen to a Mormon speak about Jesus, for example, it might sound like he is referring to the same person. When you dig a little deeper, however, it will become evident that in neither Mormonism nor in the Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) is Jesus considered to be God. They do not believe in the Trinity while Christians do. Further, probing a little deeper, we discover that in neither Mormonism nor the Watchtower Society is Jesus the Saviour, at least not in the way we understand him to be our Saviour. They have defined Jesus to be someone different from the Jesus we know.

The conclusion, then, must be this: while different religions may use the same terminology, they are not referring to the same thing. To believe in the Jesus as defined by the Watchtower Society will not result in salvation. In contrast, to believe in Jesus as defined by Christianity, which uses the Bible as its only source of inspiration, will result in salvation, both now and for eternity. In fact, salvation is fully dependent on our understanding of who Jesus is. To understand him differently is to put our salvation in jeopardy.

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The Athanasian Creed (one of the three creeds of our church, in addition to the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed) is also one of the least read and studied of the three creeds. It's the longest, and it tends to feel somewhat repetitive when you read it. It's an old creed (probably not written by Athanasius although attributed to him), and its content comes to us from a lengthy discussion held by the church in its early years. The Christian church wanted to have a clear statement regarding both the Trinity in general and specifically Jesus Christ who is God incarnate (God made flesh). Responding to some rather troublesome statements about Jesus, the early church studied Scripture deeply and came up with the statements that we find in the Athanasian Creed, statements which Jews, Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah's witnesses do not believe. As the creed concludes, it says that "one cannot be saved without believing it (the creed) firmly and faithfully." There was good reason, then, that the church spent so much time arriving at a careful definition of who God is: salvation was at stake. If we make Jesus into someone he is not, we cannot be saved, implies the Creed, and that is a horrible thought.

Today people tend to avoid thinking too deeply about the definitions that were once so all-important. We tend to avoid theology and rather want to think more about behaviour. In many Christian traditions, there is almost no mention of theology and much talk about living rightly. It's not that living rightly should not be a major topic of discussion for Christians, but living a proper lifestyle does not save us. Only Jesus saves, and we need to know who Jesus is in order to believe in him. If we misunderstand who Jesus is, we will be believing in someone other than Jesus (even if he has the same name), and we cannot be saved.

Thankfully, we do not need to know all the finest details of who Jesus is to be saved. We don't need a doctorate in theology to ensure that we have all the right information. We can put our faith in Jesus without knowing everything about him. Still, we should be sure that what we think we know is true. And, again, thankfully, we can know what is true because we have our Triune God's revelation of himself, a revelation that is found in Scripture.

We also have the advantage of being able to draw upon the hard work of others. Creeds like the Athanasian Creed are helpful for us in understanding who our Triune God is, and we would do well to review that creed from time to time. After all, if we do not believe in the God of Scripture (on which the Athanasian Creed is based), we are in danger of not being saved. You can't get to Atwood on the Alberta Highway 23, and you shouldn't expect to be able to do so. But you can get to Vulcan or Nobleford or Monarch. And if that is where you want to go, then you had better be on the right highway.

*Pastor Gary*