

**8/17/08**

Today we are examining, based on God's Word, the topic of The Similarities between Alaska native religions and the Christian faith. Rather than start with a story, I want you to look with me at **Proverbs 17:28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.** I confess to you a lack of real knowledge on traditional Alaska native religions. It would be foolish for me to act like I had such knowledge. Please keep my lack of knowledge on Native faith in mind as I speak today.

I actually did do research all week, finally calling the Alaska Native Heritage Center, and they put me in touch with a number of web sites. The most helpful page I found summarizing native values, not religious practices, is found on the back page with my additions. Please notice that Alaska natives, according to this web site, embrace diversity, value family, patience, humility, and a spiritual connection between all things. What struck me is that many of these values are shared by Christians as well. Please notice that I added Bible verses, mainly from Proverbs, to show that these native values show a wisdom that Christians claim to value too.

Are we the same? Actually, many cultures hold these values. We should not be surprised to find similar values around the world. Romans 1:20 tells us why. **For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.** This is called natural knowledge.

In spite of these similarities, among the many differences, there is one big difference. The story is told of a famous man in India who seeing similarities in Christianity with the many religions in that country commented on the one difference. *Christianity has a Savior.* In fact, Scripture tell us that no one can be saved by keeping God's laws, only by His grace. Romans 3:20-24 tells us, **20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**

In fact, Scripture is plain, that because we cannot save ourselves, it is only through Jesus that we can be saved. We are told this in John 14: 6 where Jesus says, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** We hear this again in Acts 4:10-12 where Peter and John state **10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** It is only through Jesus that sinful people have eternal life.

This creates problems for Christians. What happens when you assert this absolute truth, that it is only through Jesus that one can be saved? You can seem arrogant, or cold hearted. I remember a woman in a member class who was Alaskan native. She

was truly troubled by the concern she had for her elders, who did not know Jesus. How does a Christian act?

Today, many, if not most Alaskan natives are Christians who believe in Jesus, in spite of the atrocities committed against them by Christians. Praise God. For you and I two verses might help. 1 Peter 3:15, which we have considered many times, says, **But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,** Gentleness and respect are not easy. Perhaps the key is that Christians in this way share their hope, not their self-rightness.

Romans 9 also helps. Here Paul is talking of his concern for his Jewish brothers and sisters who might not believe in Jesus. He expressed his concern in this way, **I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. . .** Paul does not speak in arrogance, but in concern and love for others.

There are other similarities I have heard, but there are so many distinct Alaskan native groups. Perhaps what today's study has done is help us to consider attitudes to use when sharing Jesus with others. For, Jesus did not just come for Americans. Jesus himself says, **John 3:16 "For God so loved THE WORLD that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** May we show the whole world the love God has in Jesus.

St. John - love and faithfulness in outreach

THANKS -

GRIEVING Cathy Smith,

ILL Joel Stefanski  
Cathy Smith, - hip  
(Mary Olson)  
Donna France  
Tom Berberich  
Dave Miranda  
Paul Ziegler  
Kristin Kopperud  
Pat Mills  
Glen Price

Military Eric and Katie Hermon  
Luke Falkenburg  
Keenan Comb, in jured

LS