**Halloween Script**

Aaaaaargggghhhh! Right. Good morning everybody. Today, I want to talk to you about Halloween. Phew, it’s hot under there. When is Halloween? Halloween is obviously October the 31st. Why is it October the 31st? Well, to understand that first we have to talk about what Halloween actually is.

What does the word “Halloween” mean? Well, “hallow” and “een” are two separate words. “Een” is a shortened form of “evening”. We can also call it “eve”. Christmas, Christmas Eve. Hallow, Hallow Eve. Halloween. So, Halloween is the day that comes before Hallow. And what’s Hallow? Well, November the 1st is All Hallows’ Day, or Saints’ Day, it’s sometimes called. It’s a Christian celebration. It’s basically a celebration for the dead people … the dead saints basically. It’s a day when people can worship and be thankful and appreciate and pray for all of the dead people. This is a Christian festival and it started in about the 8th century.

So, does that mean Halloween comes from the 8th century? Well, yes and no. Halloween is technically a Christian festival, although a lot of the festivals … a lot of the Christian festivals we have these days were not originally Christian festivals. You may already know this but a long time ago, a Roman Emperor, Constantine, he was Emperor from 306 to 337AD, he was Emperor of Western Rome and basically, he is the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity. He was the first Roman Emperor to stop persecuting the Christians, to give them license to pray, to worship, and to even finance them and help build their castles … no … help build their churches. St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican was commissioned by him, I believe. He is the first person, he is the first Emperor to embrace Christianity. Of course, Christianity did exist before him. If you look at a map of early Christianity, well, of course, it starts in Jerusalem, and it spreads out across basically the port areas. If you look at an early map, it spreads out across into points of Northern Egypt, Northern Africa, up into Southern Europe and Southern Italy and those kinds of areas, basically the port towns. Christianity is spreads by boats, but it doesn’t spread much further than that until the Emperor Constantine comes on the scene.

Now, there are two possibilities here. The one possibility, the rather cynical possibility, is that he was not actually a Christian. He had a lot of rebellions during his reign, he had a lot of problems during his reign and he needed to unite the people and one way of doing that, of course, is under a religion. And, realizing this, he embraced Christianity to help bring the Christians to help him. That’s the cynical view. The non-cynical view, of course, is that he was actually a Christian and he believed everything he said he did. Well, whatever the reason, it doesn’t matter. The result is the same. Because of him, Christianity flourished.

Now, how do you do this? How do you introduce a new religion into areas that have an old religion, a pagan religion? Well, the easiest way of doing it is to appropriate their festivals and make them new festivals. Now, if you look at the Christian festivals, Christmas is obviously a good example. When is Christmas? December the 25th. What does Christmas celebrate? It celebrates the birth of Christ. But, if you look into the Bible, when was Christ born? It doesn’t actually say. There are some hints. It says that lambs were being birthed and things like that, but, of course, lambs are not birthed in the winter. Lambs are birthed in the early spring so, April or May time. So, if you look at the Bible itself, Christ probably wasn’t born in December. So, why is Christmas December 25th? Well, the basic reason is that was the time when the people in most of Europe celebrated the winter solstice. It’s the … basically the end … the middle of the winter, the midpoint of winter. From there is starts to get lighter, it starts to get … we start to head towards summer. So, the winter solstice was a celebration of the ending of winter, the birth of the new year, in fact. So, what better place, what better time, to input the birth of Jesus Christ? So, the winter solstice becomes Christmas. Another example is Easter, of course. Easter celebrates the rebirth of Jesus. Now Easter, of course, was also a pagan festival. There is the pagan god Eostre, I’m not sure if I’m pronouncing that right, Eostre who was the goddess of dawn, the goddess of rebirth. And we use eggs and we use rabbits, the Easter rabbit, to celebrate this and of course those are also pagan symbols of fertility. So, Easter was another festival that was appropriated by the Christians. Halloween, yet another one. Halloween was a harvest festival called Samhain. Now, we’re going to talk about that in a minute, but, so, Constantine, he basically appropriated these pagan festivals and made them Christian festivals. If people are already celebrating it’s very simple, very easy, to change the reason why they are celebrating. And that’s what Constantine did.

Another thing he did is he also actually chose the books … the testaments that go into the Bible. If you look at the New Testament there are basically four books; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Well, Constantine is the person responsible for choosing those books. He discarded a lot of other books that we could now have but we don’t have. He chose those books. Anyway, that’s for another lecture.

Halloween. So, Halloween comes from the pagan festival of Samhain. Samhain began in Ireland, the Celtic area, so Ireland, Scotland, those kinds of areas of England, of Europe. Sorry, I shouldn’t say England, people get angry if I say that. And Samhain was basically a festival, it wasn’t a harvest festival, it was a festival at the end of the harvest and just before the beginning of the winter. The harvest had finished, you had taken in all the crops, all the fruit, everything was stored, and winter was coming, the days were about to get dark, it was going to get cold, the days were going to become short, it was basically the end of the year almost. And people thought at this point, this very point between the end of the summer and the beginning of the winter, people thought that at this point the firmament was at its thinnest, the space between our world and the world of the dead was at its thinnest. And that was the point where the dead could come back. That was the point where we could contact the dead. Now, because of that, people would leave out offerings for the spirits outside their house. Everything. Things they’d taken from the harvest. The fruits, the apples, the corn, whatever, the potatoes. They would leave them outside their house as offerings for the spirits.

So, how do we get from a festival like Samhain into a religious festival that became Halloween, to this: pumpkins and masks and fake bats and things like that. What happens? Well, basically, Halloween became Americanized, as a lot of things do these days. And, how did that happen? Well, as I said, Halloween, Samhain, comes from Ireland. Now, in 1845 to about 1852, Ireland suffered a devastating famine. A potato famine. The potatoes were infected by a blight which is a disease that basically destroys the potatoes. Ireland is … was incredibly dependent on potato crops. There are many reasons for that but, once the potato crop fails, there is no food. And if that happens, what choices do you have? You can either starve to death or you can leave. So, during that time, approximately one million Irish people starved to death. It was a huge famine. But another one million people left. They emigrated. And where did they go? The New World. They went to, mostly, America, but also Canada. And they took all of their celebrations with them. These days, Halloween, St. Patrick’s Day, are probably more celebrated in America than they are in the original Ireland.

So, the Irish people took the traditions of Halloween to America. Now, two of those things that they kept, two of those things that they took that we still use, one of them, of course, is the pumpkin, here. We carve pumpkins, jack o’lanterns, Jack o’lantern, incidentally, means Jack of the lantern. The “o” means of, like four o’clock, four of the clock. The jack o’lantern. In the original Ireland, in the original festival, they used to carve turnips. Turnips are small, whiteish vegetables. They are very very hard. They’re very difficult to carve. When they went to America, of course, they found these giant, soft, easy to carve pumpkins. So, what did they do? Well, of course, they ditched the turnip and they started carving the pumpkins. So, the jack o’lantern, which began as a turnip, became a pumpkin. Now, of course, nobody carves turnips.

The second thing, of course is, uuuurrrrrghhhh, trick or treat! Trick or treat! Trick or treat came from a very early tradition of basically dressing up as a spirit or a fairy or a soul of a dead person and going round to someone’s house to scare them. People believed, again of course, that the firmament was thin, that the dead could come back basically at this point. So, people would dress up as ghosts, dress up as spirits, fairies, and they would go round to houses and to ward off the evil spirits they would be given something called a soul cake. A soul cake is basically a cake with a cross baked into the top of it. And this soul cake would be an offering, would be something to ward off the evil spirits, to appease the evil spirits. That was called mumming or souling. These days it’s trick or treating. About 1930 in America, trick or treating started to happen. Do we know why we do it? No. It’s become entirely commercialized. Just like Christmas. Just like most other original pagan religious festivals. They’re now commercialized. Why do we trick or treat? Well, it’s fun and we want the candy.

Anyway, thanks for watching. I’m going to take my daughter trick or treating. Talk to you next time. Don’t forget to subscribe. Bye. Oh! My mask.

**Halloween Questions**

1. What is Halloween the shortened form of?

A: Hallowed Evening

B: All Hallows’ Day

C: All Hallows Evening

D: All Saints’ Day

2. What kind of festival was Halloween before the 8th century?

A: A Christian one

B: A pagan one

C: A Roman one

D: An American one

3. Which one of these is **not** an effect the Emperor Constantine had on Christianity?

A: He financed and commissioned churches.

B: He ended the persecution.

C: He chose the testaments that went into the Bible.

D: He transferred Christianity through the port towns.

4. What is the non-cynical view of the Emperor Constantine’s relationship with Christianity?

A: He was a Christian

B: He used Christianity to beat a rebellion

C: He built many churches

D: He used Christianity to unite his people

5. What was the winter solstice?

A: The end of the summer

B: The end of the harvest

C: The midpoint of winter

D: The end of the winter

6. What did pagans use rabbits and eggs as?

A: A symbol of fertility

B: A symbol of harvest

C: A symbol of rebirth

D: A symbol of dawn

7. What did the Irish think was special about the time between the harvest and the winter?

A: The spirits had gone to space

B: The days were going to get shorter

C: The nights were going to get shorter

D: The firmament was at its thinnest

8. Why did many Irish people go to America?

A: Because they wanted to take Irish traditions to America

B: Because there was a famine in Ireland

C: Because they wanted to take potatoes to America

D: Because they wanted to take Christianity to America

9. What does the “o” in jack o’lantern mean?

A: on

B: out

C: of

D: over

10. What were soul cakes for?

A: To reward children for being good

B: To keep evil away

C: To put inside a pumpkin

D: To eat with pumpkin pie

11. Why do you think Christianity was transmitted through port towns and ships?

12. How can a religion unite people?

13. Explain some of the reasons why a famine can occur and suggest some solutions.

14. Explain a festival that is native to your country.

15. Explain a tradition or custom that has been introduced to your country from another country. How do you feel about this?

16. Festivals, traditions and customs evolve over time. Should this be accepted, or should we insist that they remain the same?

**Halloween Answers**

1. C 2. B 3. D 4. A 5. C 6. A 7. D 8. B 9. C 10. B

11. Why do you think Christianity was transmitted through port towns and ships?

Two reasons, I think. Obviously, it was transmitted by ships because two thousand years before the invention of email, news could only travel three ways: by man on foot, by man on horse, by man on ship. Ship was the fastest and went the farthest. So, why it travelled by ship is clear. However, why it took a hold is another question. People who live in port towns are used to meeting people and ideas from many different countries and they tend to be more open minded than the general population. Customs and laws are probably laxer here than elsewhere. A new idea, such as Christianity, would find less competition from local influences and could stick more easily. Secondly, people in a port town are probably less innocent than elsewhere. There is more crime, smuggling, piracy, drinking and prostitution. What better person to fall for a religion that proposes forgiveness for all sins than a port person?

12. How can a religion unite people?

In many ways, but let’s consider four. Firstly, religion takes the group mentality to an extreme. Human beings work best when they know they are part of a group and their actions are not alone. A religion gives people this sense of security at a statewide level. Prayer, doctrine, church visits, bible etc, all tell people that everyone else is doing what they are doing. Belonging brings reassurance and safety. Safe people are less likely to rebel. Secondly, with a religion, and this is an extension of the group mentality, you have a clear us and them. Us being co-believers. No matter how bad the head of your country is, if they are a co-believer it can be almost impossible to turn on them. Thirdly, with a religion you know your place, both in the universe and in the hierarchy. You know a god is looking over you and you know where you are. You also know the priest above you, the bishop above them, and you know the system goes further up. You know your place. You know not to question or speak out. And, fourthly, a religion promoting an afterlife can encourage people to work harder and sacrifice more in this world. If you know the good life is coming after you die, you will put up with more in this life. And, people who think the afterlife is worth waiting for are less likely to start uprisings.

13. Explain some of the reasons why a famine can occur and suggest some solutions.

There are many reasons why a famine could occur, both natural and manmade. I would like to discuss one natural reason and one manmade. As for solutions, they depend entirely on the reason for the famine, the location and the environment.

A natural famine can be caused by a disease. If a country is heavily dependent on one type of crop and a disease destroys that crop, then they have nothing to fall back on. Wheat in the west, rice in the east, potatoes in Ireland and many other staple crops are good examples. A disease that strikes in one part of a country can spread with lightning speed across the whole country. Mad Cow Disease in the UK and the potato blight in Ireland prove this point. And, once a crop fails, there is no time to replace it in that year, or probably the next few. A famine that starts from natural conditions can last a few years.

A manmade famine can have causes in war, mismanagement or manmade pathogens. I would like to consider the famine that is currently taking place in North Korea as a good example of willful mismanagement. North Korea has decided, for whatever reasons, that it needs to bolster its military capabilities for a fight with America that it seems to see as certain. It appears of no consequence that North Korea could not win that fight even where they to apply 100% of their GDP to the military. As of now, 2017, they are spending 25 to 30% of their GDP on the military. That, coupled with the huge array of sanctions levied against them and some of the worst weather for years, has caused a nationwide famine that is killing hundreds of thousands. North Korea suffered another famine in the 1990s that killed up to 3.5 million people (although North Korea claims it was just 200,000). What causes it? Money is directed towards the capital, towards the military. Food is appropriated from the rural areas and forcibly delivered to the cities or sold as exports. And the famine is hidden. USAID Administrator Andrew S. Natsios said, “there has been no known famine in a democracy. In a democracy, people take action long before that point. Famines take place under centralized governments precisely because information can be hidden.” A very interesting observation.

And what are solutions? Treat the cause, not the symptoms. But, until then, as much foreign aid as possible. The fact that people are starving to death in a world where I can eat so much my stomach hurts is unconscionable.

14. Explain a festival that is native to your country.

That is an interesting question and my answer very much depends on how “native” is defined. I would like to talk about an English celebration called Bonfire Night, but it has only existed for a few hundred years so, although it is definitely “native”, it is not that old.

Bonfire Night is celebrated on the 5th of November. It is a night to celebrate Guy Fawkes failure to blow up the Houses of Parliament and kill King James I in 1605, on November 5th. Guy Fawkes and his group of compatriots placed barrels of gunpowder under the Houses of Parliament. Thanks to a tip off, they were caught. Guy Fawkes was tortured until he confessed and then hung drawn and quartered. (If you Google his signature before and after torture, you can see what an effect it has on people). Since then, every November 5th, people in towns spend weeks piling up wood, trees and any type of non-toxic burnable rubbish in a giant pile on waste ground and then burn it. An effigy of Guy Fawkes is usually burned as well. People set off fireworks and eat toffee apples and other good food. Most people have probably forgotten the original meaning of the festival and just have fun these days. Also, incidentally, bonfire night is the cause of a 300% rise in the callouts of the UK firefighting departments and the number of firework related injuries sky rockets.

15. Explain a tradition or custom that has been introduced to your country from another country. How do you feel about this?

Even though I am English, I reside in Japan, so I would like to talk about the introduction of Christmas into Japan. Christmas is not a Japanese festival It was introduced by missionaries to the country but never really found ground, generally owing to the lack of religious sentiment in Japan. These days, however, Christmas has taken off and it has been driven largely by commercialism. Stores, seizing on an opportunity to sell more, began using it in advertising campaigns. Santa popped up everywhere. Christmas trees and elves abound. And Christmas has become a day of present giving, happiness, romance and joy. I find nothing wrong with that. Obviously, the average person in Japan doesn’t understand the true meaning of Christmas, but I would argue the average person in England or America doesn’t either. They may believe that it is a Christian holiday but, as Steven says in his talk, it comes from a long way before that. So, Japanese people having fun and giving presents to each other? I see nothing wrong with that.

16. Festivals, traditions and customs evolve over time. Should this be accepted, or should we insist that they remain the same?

I don’t think it is something that needs to be accepted or fought against because it is a natural, unavoidable process. The world changes People change. Technology changes. To think that we can or should continue to celebrate things in the same way is naïve. In fact, many of the traditions we have inherited from centuries ago had already changed before then. Halloween came from Samhain, but how do we know that the Samhain celebrated before the 8th century was the same one that was celebrated before the 4th century? We do not, and we cannot. So, evolving traditions is a natural process.

The other, unasked part of this question, is to ask if it is acceptable that we no longer know the reason for the traditions we celebrate? But, again, the reasons have already changed when we receive the tradition. Christmas had different origins to what we understand today. I do, however, believe we should be taught about all the known origins. We don’t necessarily need to celebrate them, but it would be good for people to understand them.