

THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE
(John 14:4-14)

⁴And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. ⁵ Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ⁶ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. ⁷ If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. ⁸ Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. ⁹ Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father? ¹⁰ Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. ¹¹ Believe me that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. ¹² Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. ¹³ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.

In our text for this morning, Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples following the Passover supper. And he has gently hinted that he is going away.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come.

John 13:33

Now the disciples are not quite sure what he means when he says he is going away. And they begin to ask him questions about it.

You will notice first that Simon Peter asked him a question.

Lord, whither goest thou?

And last week we saw that Jesus told Peter that he was going to the Father's house where there were many dwelling places. And Jesus told him that he was going there to prepare a place for him. Now the Father's house was a phrase that Jesus used to describe heaven. And Jesus told Peter that in the Father's house, that is, in heaven, there were many dwelling places. So Jesus didn't go there to build the dwelling places. There were already many of them there. But Jesus went to make redemptive preparations. He went to the cross to shed his blood. And then he ascended into the heavens to offer his sacrifice to the Father on behalf of Peter and the other disciples and all those who would believe in his name. And those heavenly dwelling places were sanctified and set apart for the eternal enjoyment of the saints by his redemptive work. And so, Jesus told Peter, I go to prepare a place for you.

And furthermore, Jesus told Peter, "After I have done my redemptive work of preparing a place for you, in due time I will come back for you and I will take you there to live with me." (John 14:3) Now when Jesus said, "I will come back for you," this was undoubtedly a reference to the final resurrection of the saints. It is a reference to that last day when Jesus will come back and call the bodies out of the graves. And one of those bodies will be the body of Peter. And Jesus will then take Peter to a dwelling place in the Father's house.

Now we know that when Peter died his body remained behind but his soul went immediately to heaven. And his soul was with the Lord in a temporary state there. The Scriptures clearly teach that even though the body is left behind for a while, the soul of the believer goes immediately to be with the Lord in heaven.

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

II Corinthians 5:8

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.

Philippians 1:23

You remember what good news Jesus gave the thief repentant thief on the cross,

Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Luke 23:43

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

II Corinthians 5:1

And then, of course, we have the story of the rich man and the beggar and how when they died the rich man went to hell and the beggar went to heaven.

And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom . . .

Luke 16:22, 23

And so, there is abundant evidence in the Scriptures that for those in Christ there is nothing to fear in death. Death is a release from the troubles of this world. It is an escape from the bonds of mortality. And it is an immediate transfer from earth to heaven. That is why Paul said, "For me to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21)

But Jesus told Peter,

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself . .

John 14:3

Now when Jesus told Peter, "I will come again, and receive you to myself," he must have been speaking of the body. It is the body that Jesus will come back to retrieve. And Jesus will reunite the soul to the body and he will take soul and body back to the Father's house where there are many dwelling places and where redemptive preparations have been made. And there, Jesus will live gloriously and joyously with Peter and with his saints forever.

Now look what Jesus told Peter and the other disciples.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

John 14:4

Now even though the disciples were slow to lay hold of the fact that Jesus was about to suffer and to die the very next day, nevertheless they had been instructed about his death all along the way. As the law sometimes puts it, "They knew or should have known . . ." Jesus told them, "You know where I am going."

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Matthew 16:21

Right after he fed the five thousand, Jesus took his disciples aside and he told them,

The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.

Luke 9:22

Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

Luke 18:31-34

So, in light of all this, Jesus told them, “You know where I am going. I have told you all about it.” Furthermore, Jesus told them,

And the way you know.

John 14:4

Now it is Thomas who is exasperated and Thomas lifts up his voice to ask Jesus a question.

Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Jesus must have felt like pulling his hair out dealing with these disciples. First Peter said, “I will die for you,” when Jesus knew full well he would deny him three times that night. And now Thomas disputed the very words of Jesus. Jesus said, “You know where I am going and you know the way.” And Thomas said, “No we don’t. We don’t know where you are going and we don’t know the way.” It is evident that Thomas still thought Jesus was going to some place like Bethany or Capernaum or perhaps some place where he could hide out. And so he says, “How can we know the way when we don’t even know where you are going?”

And so now let’s consider Jesus’ answer to Thomas.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

John14:6, 7

Now in his answer to Peter’s question, Jesus had already described where he was going. He was going to his Father’s house where there were many dwelling places. But, it seems that Thomas still didn’t get it. And so, Thomas says, “How can we know the way if we don’t even know where you are going?”

In his answer to Thomas’ question, Jesus focused on the way to heaven. And he said, “I am the way.” Now of course, Thomas was looking for physical directions. If it had been modern times Thomas would have asked for an address and he would have looked it up on “Mapquest.” But Jesus was going to a heavenly place with a heavenly address and so he gave Thomas the spiritual directions to heaven. He said, “I am the way.”

This is a very important statement by Jesus because essentially Jesus said there is only one way of acceptance before God. There are not many ways. There is one way. Jesus after all did not say, “I am a way,” but he said, “I am the way.”

This statement by Jesus casts a dagger into the heart of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism says there may be many ways to get to heaven. There may be many ways to find acceptance with God. God accepts the Buddhist in his meditations.

God accepts those who revere and worship Mohammad. God accepts those who do rituals. God accepts those who try hard. Religious pluralism says we may all be right in our own way. It says that we should not reject but that we should accept different beliefs regarding God and salvation.

There is a whole spirit of religious ecumenicalism in the world today that says we should put aside our various differences and find whatever common ground there may be so that we can all worship together in harmony. And all religions can meet together at some giant interfaith conference and worship together.

But Jesus said, "I am the way." Jesus set the parameters for acceptance with God and those parameters are exclusive and narrow. Jesus said in another place, "I am the door."

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

John 10:9

And again,

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

John 10:11

And later in John,

I am the true vine.

John 15:1

We don't believe in religious pluralism and we don't put any value in religious ecumenicalism. If we were to sit down to worship with the various religions of the world we would have to leave our Bibles at home because they don't believe it. We would have to disavow the high morality of the Bible because the Bible condemns what the world cherishes. We would have to condone such perverse things as homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle when the Bible declares that it is a vile affection. We would have to accept all manner of strange religious practices and idol worship in order to get along with the world. We would have to tolerate the universally held concept that men somehow can be saved by works. But mostly, we would have to disavow that Jesus is the only way to heaven and the only way to be accepted by God the Father. And we believe that Christianity does not allow for such compromise.

And Jesus himself does not allow for such compromise for he finished his statement by saying,

No man cometh unto the Father; but by me.

John 14:6

You see, wholehearted allegiance to Jesus Christ is the only road that leads to that place called heaven. No other roads will take you there. In fact, all other roads lead to a most displeasing place called hell.

In our text, Jesus used three words to describe himself. He said, "I am the way, I am the truth and I am the life." These words are obviously full of meaning and they describe in some measure the essential nature of Christ. He is the exclusive way to heaven. He is the living embodiment of truth. And in him is life itself.

It seems to me that by these three concepts Jesus was setting Christianity apart from all other religions. All religions claim to be a way to heaven. But Jesus said, "I am the way." All religions claim to have some form of the truth. But Jesus said, "I am the truth." All religions claim to attain unto life in some fashion. But Jesus said, "I am the life." These are the three great aspirations of all men – to know the way to God and to heaven, to have the truth and to gain life. And Jesus told Thomas, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

I would like to take a moment and to set out the contrast here between Judaism and Christianity because in the day of Jesus it was misguided Judaism that turned out to be the antithesis of Christianity. Judaism was designed to prefigure Christianity but the misuse of it by the reprobate turned Judaism into a misguided and worldly religion in sharp contrast to Christianity.

The lost Jews thought that the Law was the way to heaven. They thought it was works that would ultimately get you there. And so they labored hard under the Law. And they found out in the end that the Law wasn't the way to heaven after all. The Law was only the schoolmaster designed to lead them to Christ. You see, Christ was always the way to heaven, not the Law. The only saving influence of the Law was when it led men to despair and pointed them to Christ.

The lost Jews thought that the Law was the truth. They thought that all truth was found written on tables of stone and on parchment. And they worshipped the written word. But they found that the things under the Law were only types and shadows of truth. The human priests were not the real Priest at all. The animal sacrifices were not the real sacrifice at all. The tabernacle was not the real tabernacle. Their altar was not the real altar. And so, their truth under the Law was not the substance of things but merely the picture of Christ. And Jesus told Thomas, "I am the truth." Jesus is the actual substance of things. He is the reality of which other things under the Law were merely the shadow.

And the lost Jews thought they had found life in the Law. They thought that if somehow they could achieve a measure of success under the Law that they could climb their way to heaven and to fellowship with the Father. Oh how they tried. They made their interpretations of the Law down to the minutest detail in their efforts to find life. And they found in the end that there was no life in their feeble attempts to obey the Law. There was condemnation under the Law but there was no life. But there is life in Jesus.

And so, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me.”

This is the essence of salvation. It is that through Christ we are acceptable to the Father. This is life – that we may approach the Father without being cast out. All of the other great benefits of salvation flow from this. We will have peace and joy and fulfillment and health and happiness. And we will have a dwelling place in heaven. And we will live in that great city with streets of gold and gates of pearls. But all of that stems from being accepted by the Father. And this is what Christ does for his people. And so he tells the disciples, “If you know me, then you know the Father. If you see me, you see the Father.

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from hence forth ye know him, and have seen him.

John 14:7

What a gigantic statement that was from Jesus. “Boys, let me tell you something. You have come to know me these last three years. We have sat under the trees on many occasions and fellowshiped together. We have laughed and cried and prayed together. And we are more than friends. I have loved you and you have loved me. And let me give you some good news. If you know me, you know the Father. If you see me, then you have seen the Father. If I accept you, then the Father accepts you!

My, what an astonishing promise! If only they comprehended. Jesus was telling them that they were accepted by the one true God. The holy God that is the terror of sinners accepted them through the Son. If they were friends of Jesus, they were friends of the Father!

Well, right on cue, the next disciple opens his mouth.

Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

John 14:8

Jesus had just finished saying, “If you know me, then you have seen him,” and Philip says, “Show us the Father.”

What great longsuffering and patience Jesus demonstrated with his disciples! He must have felt like pulling his hair out on many occasions. They were dull of hearing. They were insensitive to spiritual things. They were impulsive. They were stubborn. They were just like you and I in many ways. Jesus might have given up on them many times, but he never did. And he might have given up on all of us many times, but he never did.

If you read between the lines, you will notice a little bit of irritation in Jesus’ tone with Philip.

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

John 14:9

One of the great doctrinal truths which Jesus presented over and over while he was on the earth was that he was one with the Father. Now when Jesus said, "I and my Father are one," (John 10:30) there are two senses in which this is true. First of all, Jesus is one with the Father in an ontological sense. That is, he is one with the Father in his essence. All that the Father is, the Son is. There is no contradiction between the nature of the Father and the nature of the Son. This is what Jesus meant when he said,

He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

And Jesus also referred to this union of essence when he asked of Philip,

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?

John 14:10

So there is a unity of essence between the Father and the Son. But, because there is a unity of essence between the Father and the Son, there is necessarily a functional unity. That is, they do the same things. They have exactly the same nature, exactly the same purposes and goals and this translates to unity of action. And this is why Jesus said,

The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doth the works.

John 14:10

So there is a unity of essence between the Father and the Son. And there is a unity of function between the Father and the Son. These two concepts are expressed in verse eleven where Jesus asks Philip to believe in the unity of essence between the Father and the Son. But if he cannot stretch so far as to believe in the unity of essence, at least believe in the unity of function.

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

John 14:11

Now I want to finish this section by evaluating verses 12-14.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

John 14:12-14

These verses are very hard to understand and have been much debated through the centuries since Jesus uttered them. However, it seems that Jesus is asserting here that just as the Father did works through the Son while the Father was in heaven and the Son was on the earth, so the Son will do works through the disciples when the Son has ascended into heaven.

I want you to notice first of all that this promise was spoken to and applies foremost to the disciples. Surely, Jesus was speaking directly to Peter and John and Thomas and the other eleven disciples. And he told them, "The works that I do shall you do also." But this promise extends beyond the circle of the disciples because Jesus said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also."

So I think we have to say that Jesus has made a promise not only to the eleven disciples but also to all believers.

And what is it that Christ promised? Well, he promised to endow them with power after his departure. Apparently, believers would have power to perform miraculous works just as Jesus performed them during his earthly ministry. And not only this, but Jesus said that believers would do greater things.

This is where the controversy comes, because how can anyone do greater works than Jesus did? Certainly, nothing could have been greater or more spectacular than when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. And the other works of Jesus were similarly amazing and displayed the power of God. But Jesus said greater works shall you do.

As you know, the disciples were endowed with great and miraculous powers in the days after Pentecost. And they did many miraculous works just like Jesus did. But because of the change in dispensations, they did other works which Jesus never did. They spoke in tongues as a sign to the Jews that the gospel had gone to the Gentiles. Jesus never spoke in tongues as far as we know. The disciples conveyed the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, but Jesus never did so. The disciples disseminated the gospel with great effect to the Gentiles whereas the ministry of Jesus was limited primarily to the Jews in Judea.

Jesus labored day and night for three years in and around Jerusalem and his ministry gathered no great flock. After his resurrection there were 120 souls gathered together in the upper room to await the coming of the Spirit. But Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached one sermon and 3,000 souls were converted. Perhaps Jesus meant that once he went to the Father, a new dispensation of grace would be launched which would have even greater and wider effects than his own personal ministry on the earth.