

# The Way, The Truth and The Life

John 14:4-6

**Call:** Ps 25/27

**Scripture:** John 3:16-17 (NIV)

## I. Introduction

In today's text, Jesus will make another audacious claim. He will claim to be the way, the truth and the life, the only way to the Father.

Do you happen to know what the Barmen Declaration is? The Barmen Declaration was a confession of faith written in 1934 by a team led by Karl Barth. The purpose of this confession was to resist the Nazification of the church in Germany by recentering the church on the cornerstones of the Christian faith. And where does this significant confession begin? It begins with this audacious claim of Jesus to be the way, the truth and the life. As the German church was trying to discern how to live in their tense environment, they understood that this claim of Jesus was what would guide their way. How may this claim of Jesus guide our way today?

### Review

Well, we continue to walk through Jesus' final words to his disciples the night before going to the cross. As we have been saying, this is Jesus' final chance to share his most important topics with his closest followers. So, in some ways, these chapters have some of the deepest teaching we have of Jesus, on par with his famous Sermon on the Mount.

Last week, in the first 3 verses of chapter 14, Jesus used the image of the 1<sup>st</sup> century betrothal ceremony to explain the purpose of his comings and goings. This week, we get this audacious claim that he is the way, the truth and the life. So, I invite you into our text this morning, John chapter 14. Even though we read verses 1-3 last week, I'm going to re-read them today.

## II. Introduction to The Way, The Truth and The Life (4-6)

*1 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (ESV)*

### A. Thomas

Jesus says, "Don't be troubled. Trust God. Trust also in me, especially in what I'm about to say." He says he is going away, but he will come back and take his followers to be with him where he is. Jesus then says they all know the way. But Thomas is confused and speaks for all the disciples. It turns out they don't know the way. "Jesus, is it the road north to San Francisco,

or is it the road south to LA? Or is it the road to Rome to conquer Caesar? Jesus, we don't know the way!"

And Jesus answers him, *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (14:6)

At which point, I'm sure Thomas is still thinking. Ok Jesus. But, which road are we taking? But Jesus isn't talking about a literal road is he? He's talking about a way of life that ultimately leads to the Father.

## **B. The I AM Statements**

Now, notice Jesus doesn't say, "I am a way, a truth, a life." Jesus doesn't even say, "I know what the way is, what the truth is, what the life is." Jesus says, "I am *the way, the truth and the life.*" This is the 6<sup>th</sup> of 7 I AM statements with a predicate in this Gospel. These I AM statements go a long way in describing Jesus' identity as the great I Am. "They are emphatic descriptions of the person of Jesus, and they cumulatively form a detailed picture of Jesus" (Klink, 617). And, the one today could almost be a summary of all seven.

## **C. Transition**

Obviously, this I AM statement today has three great truths in it, each of which deserve a single sermon. But, we don't have time for that, so I will spend the rest of this sermon sharing a bit about each one, with a few implications at the end. And, we'll take them backwards because "the way" captures much of the truth and the life.

# **III. The Life**

## **A. Introduction**

Jesus is the life. John's Gospel is all about life. In fact, it's been called the Gospel of life, because of its purpose statement in chapter 20: John wrote his Gospel so that we may believe, *"and that by believing [we] may have life in His name"* (20:31). And, of course, life has been a great theme throughout.

- In chapter 1, we hear that in Jesus there is life (1:4).
- In chapter 3, those who believe in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life (3:16).
- In chapter 4, we hear about a fountain of living water (4:14).
- In chapter 5, the Son has life in himself and gives life to whomever he wills (5:21, 26).
- In chapter 6, Jesus claims to be the bread of life (6:35, 51).
- In chapter 8, the one who follows Jesus will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (8:12).
- In chapter 10, Jesus claims to come to give an abundant life (10:10).
- In chapter 11, Jesus claims to be the resurrection and the life (11:25).
- And here, Jesus is simply the life.

## **B. Zoe**

What is helpful for me is to understand the Greek word here for life. The Greek word is zoe. I have spoken about this before, but let me refresh your memory. There are two words in the Greek language for life, bios and zoe. The word that describes the life we live now is bios. Bios is a beautiful life, but it wears down and has an end. Bios life is constantly moving toward death, which is why we say at the grave, “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” That’s simply what happens to bios life.

On the other hand, zoe life doesn’t end, because it cannot end, because it’s the life Jesus is. It’s the life of God. “I am the zoe,” Jesus says. Zoe life is in Jesus and is Jesus. Isn’t that what we see throughout the Gospels? Jesus gives and restores life everywhere. He makes people whole everywhere. All the powers of corruption and decay and even death fall down before this one, the zoe and the giver of zoe.

And, to paraphrase CS Lewis, the whole offer of Christianity is that we can share in this zoe, this life of Christ. If we do, we’re then sharing in a life which was begotten, not made, which always has existed and always will exist. In fact, Jesus came into this world in order to spread to humanity this kind of life, this zoe. And, this is what CS Lewis calls, “the good infection” (Lewis, 47). We’re always talking about bad infections these days. Here’s the good infection, to receive zoe life from the giver of zoe, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the life.

## **IV. The Truth**

### **A. Introduction**

But, Jesus also says he is the truth. In other words, truth is not an idea in our heads, but a person to be confronted in our hearts. That means truth is not so much cognitive and conceptual, but relational.

Like life, we’ve met truth already in this Gospel, particularly in chapter 8, when Jesus said that when you abide in Him as a genuine disciple, *“You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”* (8:32). We will know Jesus, and He will set us free, free from slavery to sin.

Truth is a person, and if Jesus is who he says he is, then he embodies ultimate truth. So, truth refers not just to Jesus’ personhood or what he says, but also to his whole *way* of existence. His way is truth. Jesus is ultimate reality. As one writer says, “Jesus is the standard for what is real in this world, [what is] true about God,” and true about ourselves, for he is the true God, and he is the true human.

I am the Truth, Jesus says.

And that brings us to the way.

## V. The Way

### A. Introduction

Jesus says, "*I am the way.*" At the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus invited his disciples to him by saying, "Follow me." Those words actually mean "Follow me on my way. Live the way I live. Do life the way I do life." *Way* speaks to wisdom for living life, embodied in Jesus and how he lived his life. His *way* is truth and life. It's the way he spoke, the way he prayed, the way he cared, the way he led, the way he forgave, the way he rebuked sin, the way he related to his Father, the way he died, the way he rose again... The *way* speaks to how Jesus lived his life, the entirety of the *how* of the Jesus event.

### B. The Old Testament Way

And it's an image woven deeply into the Old Testament. In Exodus, God went before the Israelites to show them the *way* (Ex 13:21). In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are instructed to keep God's commandments by walking in his *ways* (Deut 5:33). In Psalms, God instructed the Israelites to make God's *way* known among all nations (Ps 67:1-2). In Isaiah, the *way* of the Lord is the highway of holiness (Isa 35:8). And now Jesus comes along and says he is the *way*. He went before us to show us the *way*. We walk in His *way*. We make *his way* known among the nations. His *way* is the highway of holiness. And, on and on it goes.

So, what is the Jesus way? Well, I thought it might be helpful to understand first what is *not* the Jesus way.

### C. The Ancient Way

Years ago, Eugene Peterson wrote a book called *The Jesus Way*. In this book, he compares the Jesus way to several ancient ways of life, the Herod way, the Caiaphas way and the Josephus way. And, if I were to summarize their ways, they were all self-absorbed, self-serving, power-hungry, oppressive and narcissistic. That was their way. And, it was effective. Their way was influential. Their way worked in the world and many people followed them on their way. Yet their way was not the Jesus way.

### D. The Modern Way

But, what about the modern world? What is the way of the modern world that we live in right now? A friend at Regent College, Craig Gay, actually wrote a book, which I know several of you are reading, called exactly this, *The Way of the Modern World*. In it, he lists three defining characteristics of the modern way:

- **Control:** The modern way is to exert complete power and mastery over our world, especially through unexamined technology adoption. In many ways, technology now defines our *way* in the world.
- **Autonomous Individual:** The modern way is to remove God from the center of life and put us there. Humanity has now come to have such "an inflated estimation of human potential" that God has been removed from everyday life. We now define and determine our way. "Our entire cultural ethos is characterized by profound self-

centeredness” much like the ancient ways. The autonomous individual reigns supreme with no responsibility to God or neighbor.

- **Relentless Impersonal-ness:** The modern way reduces people to objects that only serve a function. People are treated carelessly and sacrificed daily in the name of progress and efficiency.

Now, as with the ancient ways, these ways are effective. The control-seeking, individualistic, impersonal way is influential. These ways work in our world, and many people follow it. Yet the modern way is not the Jesus way either.

### **E. The Jesus Way**

So, what the Jesus way? Well, the Jesus way was absolutely distinct, and still is. Jesus chose a different way, a unique way, a radical way, a *way* exactly counter from all those other options. His way is relentlessly personal, persistently selfless and steadfastly sacrificial. His way is the meek, merciful, peace-making way; the patient, kind, good way; the faithful, gentle and self-controlling way. And, his way has prayer at the center of life.

Furthermore, Jesus chose to work, not with the important people of society, but with people on the margins, giving particular attention to the little people, the hurting people and the powerless. This is the Jesus way. It always amazes me that of all the things the living God could do when he came to earth, he spent time hanging out with people on the margins.

And, of course in John this is what we see isn't it? He has a long conversation with a woman at a well and cares for a lame man and a blind man. He stands up for a woman caught in adultery, saving her from sure death. And he says, follow me on this *way* of life. Do life this *way* he says, the personal way where every single person is treated as if they're made in the image of God. This is the meek, merciful, peace-making way; the patient, kind, good way; the faithful, gentle and self-controlling way. Do life this way, he says. It is the way of the towel. It is the way of the just-as-him kind of love. This is truth. This is life. This is the way.

But, there's more. Jesus also said that he was the *only* way to the Father.

## **VI. The Only Way (6)**

### **A. Jesus is Savior**

John has already stated this fact in other places, using other words. Jesus here states it clearly for us. Jesus is the only way to God. There is only one path. In context, this explains more of his comings and goings. He is going back to the Father and will someday come back and take his followers to be with him where he is. On other words, he is the *only* access point to the Father. This is certainly an unwelcome word in our pluralistic society, but if Jesus is who he says he is, this is the truth. Because if Jesus is the truth and the life, then this is the true way. There is no compromise. Jesus is the only way to salvation. He is the only Savior of the world. As Peter says in Acts, *“Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

## **B. Jesus Lightens Every Person**

This is not to say that God has left no witness of himself elsewhere in the world. After all, we were told in chapter 1 that Jesus is the light that lightens every person (John 1:4, 9). As Dale Bruner says, “All truth is God’s truth and all life is God’s life; but God’s truth and God’s life are incarnate in Jesus” (Bruner, 824). Jesus is the only way to the Father.

## **C. Living This Truth**

This is why the earliest Christians refused to bow to Caesar. This is why they were mowed down in the coliseum. This is why Polycarp, who was disciplined by the Apostle John, when commanded to bow to Caesar as Lord, could say, “86 years have I served [Jesus] and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my king, my Lord who saved me.” And, he’s burned at the stake. This is why Bonhoeffer stood up to the Nazis. And, this is why Martin Luther King took his stand against racism. Indeed, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. And, when the church has had the courage to stand on this truth throughout history, she deeply helps people. The church hasn’t been perfect, but the church has done great good throughout history - major hospitals, schools for the less fortunate and passion for love and social justice wherever Jesus is faithfully followed (Bruner, 828). The one constant in an ever-changing world is this – Jesus is the only way to the Father. Which is why the most important question in life is “Who is Jesus to me?”

## **D. A Call For Humility**

And, yet, with this truth firmly in place, may we never boast or be arrogant. As Scripture affirms, our salvation has nothing to do with us, with our achievements, our performance or our own resourcefulness. Salvation is possible *only* through the merits, mercy and grace of Jesus Christ because “*God so loved the world*” (John 3:16). God cared so much for us, he mercifully provided *the way* through his Son. Therefore, Jesus as the only way can never be a cause for triumphalism, smugness or superiority. This truth is a call to humility.

## **VII. Implications**

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through him. Let’s close with three other implications of this audacious claim.

### **A. Love**

First of all, we come back to the love theme. The proof we understand Jesus as the way, truth and life is whether love characterizes our life. As Dallas Willard has said, “We don’t believe something by merely saying we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true” (Haugen, 79). Jesus is the way, truth and life, and his way *is* the way of love. If we believe it, the fruit will be love. The way we talk, the way we use our influence, the way we treat others, the way we raise our children, the way we read, the way we worship, the way we garden, the way we do dishes, etc. All of it will be drenched in love, after all “*love rejoices in the truth*” as Paul says (1 Cor 13:6).

## **B. Discernment**

Secondly, if we are to follow the way of the Jesus, it means discernment on a daily basis, even moment by moment basis.

In order to do this, we first need to know Jesus and his way intimately. We need to know the Gospels backwards and forwards. We need to know the way he spoke, the way he prayed, the way he cared, the way he led, the way he forgave, the way he rebuked sin, the way he related to his Father, the way he died, the way he rose again. We need to know the Gospels intimately to know what his vision and his values are, what his actions and teachings are. We need to soak in the Gospels.

Then we can discern well what the way of Jesus is moment by moment. As the church in Germany placed their discernment squarely on Jesus as the way, truth and life, so do we. The question – what is the way of Jesus right now – must become a habit in our lives, because the way of Jesus takes priority over all other ways.

So, what is the way of Jesus as I drive down the road right now? What is the way of Jesus as I enter this meeting? What is the way of Jesus as I attend the community gathering? What is the way of Jesus as I interact on-line? What is the way of Jesus as I attend my kid's sporting events? Ouch. That's convicting for me. In fact, I was at a basketball game last week, and the court next to us, their game ended in a fist fight between everyone. I don't know what happened, but unfortunately this is becoming all too common. What is the way of Jesus as I cheer on my team, my child's team, the Warriors, the Dodgers? What is the way of Jesus as I walk through my day?

But, also, this is a question we can ask when we read the news in the midst of social earthquakes. Obviously, there have been many social earthquakes over the past few years haven't there? In the midst of a flood of displaced and unhoused people, what is the way of Jesus? In the midst of the splintering of society in a pandemic, what is the way of Jesus? In the midst of the violence all over our country, what is the way of Jesus? In the midst of the antagonistic posture within physical and virtual spaces, what is the way of the Jesus?

So discernment is needed on a moment by moment basis.

## **C. Prayer**

Thirdly, the other proof we understand this truth claim is that we pray. Prayer is the primary language for everything that takes place on the way of Jesus. If we go to a restaurant in Paris, we speak French. If we travel to Romania, we speak Romanian. If we visit Liberia, we speak Liberian English. If we choose to follow Jesus on his way, we pray. That's our language. It's the language we use to speak to God and the language we use to listen to God.

As Peterson says, we pray our lives into the act of following Jesus. We become followers of Jesus from the inside out, not just following with our feet. The disciples followed Jesus with

their feet all over Palestine but it never got inside him until after the Spirit came. Prayer, with the help of the Spirit, gets the way of Jesus inside us. We become people of prayer.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. I invite you to live the way I live. I invite you to do life the way I do life. Because this way is the truth, and this way is life."

If we believe this, we'll be people of love, people of discernment and people of prayer.

So, let's close our morning in a time of prayer. Let's pray for ourselves and each other that we may have courage to live the Jesus way. I invite you to pray for yourself and to pray for your neighbors in the pews, even if you don't know them. Let's pray that the Spirit would help us get the Jesus way inside of us, and we would have the courage to live it.

Amen.

### **IX. Benediction**

Now receive this benediction which is the modern rendition of the collect (prayer) for last Sunday in the Liturgical calendar.

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life; Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who live and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

### **Resources**

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Burge, Gary, *John: The NIV Application Commentary*

Gay, Craig, *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist*

Haugen, Gary, *Just Courage: God's Great Expedition for the Restless Christian*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Lewis, C.S., *Daily Readings From His Classic Works*

Peterson, Eugene, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways That Jesus Is the Way*

Watts, Rikk, *A Journey Through John* (Regent College Course)