

QUESTION #3: “IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN?”

(John 14:1-10)

5.26.19

INTRODUCTION

Christians are often slammed for saying that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. “That’s bigoted! You guys are so narrow-minded!” Is that true? Are we intolerant — just unwilling to consider other possibilities?

Over the next two weeks we are going to be addressing this question in two different ways: Today, we will be answering this question from the standpoint of how Christ presented himself. Next week we will be answering the question by looking at other religions and belief systems through the filter of the question: “Aren’t All Religions The Same?” It should be a great couple of weeks, so I look forward to making the journey with you.

Anybody remember this [HOLD UP INDEX FINGER]? One way. During the “Jesus People” movement of the 1970s, when you greeted another believer, you would hold up your index finger, meaning, “one way,” acknowledging that, as a Christian, you believed that Jesus was the only way, truth and life. Now of course, it means “we’re no. 1.” It’s been awhile since I’ve seen an extended index finger referencing Jesus. But, of course, the meaning hasn’t gone away. Let’s look at what Jesus has to say about himself.

TEXT

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” — John 14:1-10.

First of all, notice that Jesus is bringing comfort to his disciples, who had probably picked up on the increasing apprehension in Jesus’ own mood. Keep in mind that this is all being shared just moments before they proceed from the Upper Room — where they have been eating the Passover meal, where Jesus is re-imagining that meal by transforming it into what we now observe as “The Lord’s Supper” — to the Garden of Gethsemane and all the horrors that lay ahead. Yet, despite what he knows is waiting for him, Jesus is trying to comfort and assure his closest friends. So he tells them about the eternal destination they have to look forward to — with the promise that they will one day be together with nothing to ever separate them. But Thomas doesn’t understand Christ’s words; despite Jesus saying, “You know where I’m going,” he basically says, “No we don’t.”

So, from that question, he shares some of the most well-known words in the entire Scriptures: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”*** —

Jesus Christ, John 14:6. So what is Jesus telling Thomas, and his disciples, and us? Let's break it down.

First, Jesus begins with the words "I AM." His disciples would have recognized those words as going back to Moses' meeting with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3) when God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Jesus saying this would be an undeniable way of his saying that he is the same and equal with God. So everything that follows has the authority of God because it is coming from the mouth of God — in the person of Jesus Christ.

What comes next is the famous trio: "the way and the truth and the life." But notice how Jesus is phrasing these things: THE way, THE truth, THE life. He is using what in grammar is called the "definite article." Why is that important? Imagine being sound asleep one night and suddenly being awakened by a scream followed by the unmistakable sound of a gunshot. So you call 9-1-1, and the operator naturally asks, "Do you know where the scream and the shot came from?" And you say, "Yes; absolutely." So the operator asks, "So where did they come from?" And you say, "A house." How many houses are there in Redwood Falls? Being that indefinite — "a house" — wouldn't be a help at all. The operator, not to mention police and first responders, needs to know the specific place — "THE house" — where the screaming and gunfire took place.

OK; back to the Scriptures: Jesus is being very specific: He is not saying he is "a way" or "a truth" or "a life." That would mean there are many ways, many truths and many lives which could lead to heaven — of which he is only one. But instead, he is pointing to and identifying himself as THE way, THE truth and THE life. So, what are those things which he says specifically relate to him?

THE WAY: HODOS (hod-os[^]) — figuratively, a mode or means; spoken by Jesus as his being the author and medium of access to God and eternal life.

THE TRUTH: ALETHEIA (al-ay[^]-thi-a) — what is not concealed but open and known; the reality lying at the basis of an appearance; the manifested, verifiable essence of a matter. In the NT especially, divine truth or the faith and practice of the true religion is called "truth" either as being true in itself and derived from the true God, or as declaring the existence and will of the one true God. By extension, Jesus Christ is called "the truth," meaning that he is truth incarnate (in the flesh) and therefore the teacher of divine truth, meaning truth in all its fullness and scope, as perfectly embodied by Christ, making him the ultimate expression of truth.

THE LIFE: ZOE (dzo-ay[^]) — life, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in himself, and which he gave to the Incarnate Son to have in himself and which he showed to the world. This is the life to which men become a part through faith in Christ; he is its author to all who trust in him and is said in that context to be the "life" of the believer — meaning the source of life both in this earthly existence and in the heavenly eternity to follow. This is not simply the life of breathing and moving, but also a life that reflects its source — meaning the follower of Christ reflects the life of Christ in the holy living by which Christ lived.

So what is Jesus saying? He is saying ALL of the following:

- 1) "I AM" — Jesus is acknowledging that he himself is God.
 - a) ***"Anyone who has seen me has seen me has seen the Father" — Jesus Christ, John 14:9b*** — said by Jesus to his disciples.

- b) ***“I and the Father are one” — Jesus Christ, John 10:30*** — said by Jesus to Jews gathered around him in the temple courts in Jerusalem during the Festival of Dedication.
- 2) “I AM” the definitive, one and only, pathway to God.
 - a) ***The way of fools seems right to them . . . There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death — Proverbs 12:15a, 14:12*** — from the Spirit-inspired proverbs of King Solomon, reminding us of the definition of the word “fool” as presented by Solomon’s father, King David, in Psalm 14: ***The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” — David, Psalm 14:1.***
 - b) ***“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:13-14.***
- 3) “I AM” the one and only truth about God.
 - a) ***The Son is the image of the invisible God . . . [f]or God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him — Paul, Colossians 1:15a, 19.***
 - b) ***No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known — John 1:18.***
- 4) “I AM” the one and only life from God.
 - a) ***God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son — I John 5:11b.***
 - b) ***“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” — Jesus Christ, John 17:3.***
- 5) And because Jesus is the definitive way, truth and life, no one — regardless of gender, age, background, riches, poverty, education, ability, belief, ethnicity or any other measure — has any other means of coming to God the Father except through the one and only path established by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That’s it — case closed!

APPLICATION

This is an incredibly relevant question to be looking at because we live in a time where, to be honest, truth seems to be up for grabs. Two ideas seem to really bring home that reality:

- 1) Post-modernism: a late 20th century philosophy characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism or relativism, a general suspicion of reason. Example: “That may be true for you but not for me.” Taken to its logical conclusion, post-modernists would say that truth is unknowable.
- 2) Post-truth: relating to or indicating circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotions. So for example, in post-truth politics, positions in a debate are framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertions of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored. This is not a terribly new idea: when he was coming to power, Adolf Hitler made note of the fact that a lie, no matter how false, if shouted long enough and loud enough, will begin to be accepted as truth — regardless of any actual facts to the contrary.

What this all means at its most basic is that truth has been reimagined in our time from something seen as an absolute to something that is different depending on the person speaking. The weird irony is that very often people who fuss about the intolerance of believing Jesus Christ to be the

one and only means to heaven will at the same time be intolerant of any view that contradicts their own view of what is true. There are really only three options when it comes to truth:

- 1) *All beliefs are true.* Most people would say that's impossible; something cannot be true and not true at the same time. (It's called the Law of Noncontradiction; Aristotle (4th century BC Greece) used it to show that, for instance, something cannot exist and not exist at the same time.) So that doesn't work.
- 2) *All beliefs are false.* That's fine, but there would have to be an absolute standard that could measure that statement. So that doesn't work, either.
- 3) *One belief is exclusively true.* If in fact truth is absolute, there must be one view that is true and everything else that contradicts it is false.

The fact is, to determine truth, you have to start from an absolute position; you need to have something from which to base your findings or draw any realistic conclusions. Any meaningful statement must be either true or false. Now, Jesus Christ makes this incredibly profound statement — that he is the ONLY way to God, the ONLY way to heaven. Is that true? Some observations:

First of all, when Christians are accused of being bigoted or narrow-minded to say that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, their accusers are wrong. Christians may repeat it, but Jesus is the author of the comment. Jesus said it.

Second of all, Jesus is not the only one to have said either that or words to that effect. The apostle Peter, in addressing the Sanhedrin — the same ruling body that condemned Christ to death — said: ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” — Peter, Acts 4:12.*** The apostle Paul also pointed to the centrality of Jesus Christ to our redemption. When he was preaching on his first missionary trip, in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (in southeastern modern-day Turkey), he said: ***“[T]hrough Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin” — Paul, Acts 13:38b-39a.*** Later Paul wrote these words to Timothy: ***[T]here is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people — Paul, I Timothy 2:5-6a.*** And the apostle John wrote: ***[I]f anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. . . . I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name — I John 2:1b-2, 12.***

But another question needs to be addressed that is just as important: Why is Jesus Christ the only way to heaven? If we're going to say that, yes, Jesus is the only way to heaven, we need to have a “why” to back that statement up. Remember Peter's words: ***Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have — I Peter 3:15b.*** “Because” is not a reason. So did Jesus present any specific proof about why he was in any way qualified to make such a statement and, beyond that, why he actually is the way, truth and life, the only way to heaven? Yes, he did:

First, he was specifically chosen by God to be the Savior of the world.

- 1) ***[Christ] was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God — I Peter 1:20-21.***

- 2) When an angel of the Lord came to Joseph in Nazareth to assure him of the nature of his fiancé Mary's pregnancy, he chose these words: ***"[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus ("the Lord saves"), because he will save his people from their sins" — Matthew 1:21.*** It was humanity's sins that caused there to be NO way to heaven. As Isaiah had written 700 years before all the miracles of Bethlehem: ***[Y]our iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear — Isaiah 59:2.*** But God in his amazing grace was providing a solution to that separation through his Son.
- 3) Jesus knew who he was in the context of being God's chosen instrument to bring the gift of salvation to the world:
 - a) ***"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house [be about my Father's business]?" — Jesus Christ, age 12, speaking to Mary, Luke 2:49b.***
 - b) ***"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" — Jesus Christ, Mark 10:45.***
- 4) That's why the first words of his ministry were: ***"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 4:17b.*** Those would also be the ongoing words of his ministry as continued by his followers, as he said at the end of his earthly ministry to his disciples: ***"[R]epentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in [my] name to all nations" — Jesus Christ, Luke 24:47.***

Second, Jesus Christ fulfilled prophecy (nearly 100 OT prophecies written hundreds of years before his lifetime) — including details about his birth, life and, ultimately, his death. Perhaps these words are the best known: ***Surely he took our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all — Isaiah 53:4-6.***

Third, Jesus lived a sinless and miraculous life.

- 1) ***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God — Paul, II Corinthians 5:21.***
- 2) ***[Y]ou know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect — I Peter 1:18-19***

Fourth, Jesus predicted and accomplished his resurrection from the dead.

- 1) ***From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life — Matthew 16:21.***
- 2) ***"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you'" — Mark 16:6-7.***
- 3) In accomplishing both his death and his resurrection from the dead, God through Jesus Christ sealed the victory we can know over sin, death and the power of Satan:
 - a) ***The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ — Paul, I Corinthians 15:56-57.***

- b) *[B]y his death he [broke] the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death — Hebrews 2:14b-15.*
- c) *[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification — Paul, Romans 4:25.*

IF JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN?

People tend to overlook the fact that the truth is narrow. For instance, $3 + 3 = 6$. Out of all the numbers in the universe, six is the only answer for that equation. But just because the truth is narrow doesn't make it narrow-minded. So is Jesus the only way to heaven? Yes. Ultimate truth? Yes. Ultimate life? Yes. Are those the only answers? Yes. Is that narrow-minded? No.

But that also means, then, that everything Jesus ever said in the Bible applies to me. I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. There is no other option. There is only Jesus.

So why wouldn't somebody want to be saved? It could be any of the following:

- 1) They like their life, they don't want to change, and they resent anybody trying to tell them how to live.
- 2) They believe, in the words of the Billy Joel song, "Only The Good Die Young," that "*I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints; the sinners have much more fun.*"
- 3) They judge Christ by the behavior of the church instead of by learning about him and decide, "If that's what Christ is all about, I don't want anything to do with him."
- 4) They either believe they are good enough for heaven; they haven't murdered anybody or ever stolen anything, OR
- 5) They believe this life is all there is: you live, you die, you're food for worms. That's it. There is no god, no heaven (or hell). Just life, death, the end.
- 6) Ultimately, they have become a victim of what Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthian church: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God — Paul, II Corinthians 4:4.* Therefore they are willing to trade a life of eternity in the presence of God for the momentary *fleeting pleasures of sin — Hebrews 11:25b (speaking of Moses).*

But by so doing, they are condemning themselves to an eternity far different from the one that is awaiting for a child of God. What does that look like? Maybe a picture like this [FINDING A MILLION DOLLARS ON THE ROAD AND, RIGHT NEXT TO THAT PILE, A SINGLE PENNY.]. Now most people would think anybody making that choice would be crazy. While surrendering to Christ is not about intelligence, it is about seeing Christ for who he is. And after all he has done to reveal himself to the world, maybe crazy is the best word for turning him down. But that's not our job. Presenting Jesus Christ to a world that desperately needs him is. So how are we doing?

CONCLUSION

Is Jesus the only way to heaven? Yes. Does he provide a way to heaven? Yes. Is there still room for everybody in heaven? Yes.