

I Am the Way

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Introduction.

- A. Back when I was in college, I decided that the thing to do would be to double-major. I pursued a degree in journalism so that I would have a nice, marketable degree, and, just for the fun of it, I also got a degree in religious studies that I never anticipated would be useful. Funny how that worked out.
- B. Anyway, in one of my religious studies classes, I had to read a book called *God Has Many Names*. The author compared religions from Christianity to Buddhism and asserted that underneath the different technical terminology, all of these different religions were really about the same thing. Sure, the Hindu might bow to Krishna, the Muslim to Allah, and the Christian to Christ, but underneath the surface, all of these religions weren't any different from each other. They were all part of the same basic search for the same God, and anybody who sought God along any of these paths would find him. Hence, God has many names.
- C. Now, this is a very warm, fuzzy, cozy thing to believe, but it runs into serious problems with what the Bible says about other religions. The pagans of the New Testament weren't the allies of Christianity; they were its enemies. Even more exclusive than that, though, are the words of Jesus Himself. Jesus never described Himself as one of many possible paths to God. Instead, in John 14:6, He asserts that no one comes to the Father except through Him. This obviously excludes all other religions right off the bat, but what does it mean to us? Let's explore this. Let's figure out what He meant when He said, "I am the way."

I. The Glorification of the Son.

- A. The context in which "I am the way" appears begins in John 13:31-33. The first two verses of this, all the language about Jesus glorifying God and God glorifying Jesus, all seems like very standard Scriptural stuff. We need to recognize something, though, about the context before this. See how it begins with "So when he had gone out?" That's not some apostle going out to buy donuts; that's Judas leaving to betray Christ.
- B. This is kind of weird, then, isn't it? Jesus knows perfectly well He's about to die, yet He's talking about being glorified. That doesn't seem to fit. Even today, being nailed to a cross doesn't sound like a good time, and back then, crucifixion was the blackest shame imaginable. So where's all this glory come from?
- C. What we need to understand here is that earthly glory and heavenly glory are two different things, and it was heavenly glory that Jesus was talking about. Jesus glorified Himself by obeying God, and even more importantly, He glorified God by His obedience to the point of death. Look, for instance, at John's commentary to Peter in John 21:19. Even the death of a common criminal honored the Father if it was done for Him.
- D. This is something that we need to grasp. What's important to us is not the earthly glory we gain; it's the heavenly glory we give to the Father by obeying Him. If we accomplish that, who cares about the earthly part? In this context, in fact, Jesus gives us the reason why glorifying God is so important. If we glorify God, He will glorify us. Consider the message of Philippians 2:8-9. Jesus, because of His humility and obedience, was exalted by God above all others. If we desire glory from the Father, we must follow Jesus.
- E. In this context, though, Jesus continues on by describing the consequences of His glorification. He tells the apostles that He's going to go somewhere where they cannot come, a statement He describes as the same statement He made to the Jews. Jesus is actually referring back to the conversation recorded in John 8:21-23. The Jews here aren't quite sure what He's talking about, but they think it might have something to do with death. Remember this statement of Jesus; in just a few verses, we'll see why it is important.
- F. The point is, then, that Jesus is going away. Before He does, though, there are a number of things He wants to say to His disciples, and He begins with the comment made in John 13:34-35. Now, although it might seem like it, it's not true that Jesus just jumps the conversational tracks with what He has to say here. He knows why He's about to be glorified. It's because of His obedience, and what He's doing here is handing the apostles the key to His obedience—His love. If they love like Jesus, they will obey and be glorified like Jesus.
- G. One of the goofy, goofy things about today's religious world is the way that so many want to separate love and obedience. In reality, the two are inseparable. Without love, we can't obey, and without obedience, we don't really love. We need to see that it was the perfect love of Jesus that gave rise to His perfect obedience.
- H. Imagine what it must have meant to the apostles to have Jesus tell them to love one another as He loved them! Remember; these were men who had lived with Jesus for years, men who were His best friends, and during those years, they had never seen Jesus treat them in anything but a loving way. Jesus never cared about Himself, only about them. Now He tells them "Live like that," and it's what He tells us to do too.

II. In My Father's House.

- A. So far in this context, Jesus has been the only one talking, and the only one determining what is said. We see this changing abruptly in John 13:36-37. Obviously, the one who's changing things here is Peter. Just like we

will often do, Peter's been listening along, paying attention halfway, when suddenly his mind registers that Jesus just said that He's leaving. This is big important stuff to Peter, so he says, "Whoa, whoa, hold on! Where are You going, exactly?" Remember; Peter has been with Jesus throughout His ministry. He heard the conversation in John 8:21-23 that we referred to a little while ago. Peter doesn't know exactly what's going on, but he's got an idea that Jesus is going somewhere and planning on staying there, and he doesn't like it.

- B. We see Jesus respond in the second part of the same verse. The interesting thing about this reply is that it doesn't actually answer the question Peter has asked. Peter asks, "Where are You going?" Jesus replies, "You can't come." What's going on here? When I was studying this, I thought at first that Jesus was being evasive, but that doesn't make sense. After all, Jesus says in John 14:12 that He is going to the Father. It doesn't make sense for Him to stonewall Peter when He's going to tell Peter the truth five minutes later. Instead, Jesus is answering the question Peter's heart was asking instead of the one his lips were asking. Peter doesn't really want to know where Jesus is going. Peter wants to know if he can come too. Jesus says no.
- C. It's interesting, too, why Jesus says no. He tells Peter that as of now, Peter is not capable of walking in Jesus' footsteps. This is not a literal following that Jesus is discussing. It's a metaphorical following. In specific terms, it's a question of whether Peter is willing to die for God the way that Jesus is.
- D. Peter may not know what Jesus is talking about, but he knows that he's being left behind. That's why he blurts out his comment in John 13:37. It's really easy to read Peter here as being boastful, but that's not entirely fair. He says this because he can't deal with the idea of Jesus not being in his life. Remember: Jesus is not some theological abstraction to Peter. Jesus is Peter's teacher and friend, a man Peter has traveled with and eaten with and lived with. Peter left everything and followed Jesus for years because he loved Him so much. And now Jesus is leaving him. Peter is willing to say anything for a chance to stay with Jesus.
- E. That's why Jesus' reply in John 13:38 must have been crushing. In today's terms, Jesus is telling Peter that before the alarm clock goes off tomorrow morning, Peter is going to deny Jesus three times. It's not Jesus who's keeping Peter from following; it's Peter himself. Peter is going to be tested, and he's going to fail.
- F. Now we come to what is perhaps the most unfortunate chapter break in the entire Bible. Often, we read what comes next by itself, but it's actually a response to Peter. Jesus is trying to draw the sting of what He's just said with His comments in John 14:1-3. The "you" is not some generic audience; it's Peter, the man who has just been told that he's going to deny his Lord. What Jesus is telling Peter in response is that there is a place in heaven for him anyway, and that Jesus is leaving to start preparing that place right now. Peter, the man who's going to flunk the test completely, will get to dwell eternally with Jesus anyway.
- G. Friends, there may well be no more marvelous thought expressed in Scripture than that one, because what applies to Peter applies to us too. All of us are spiritual failures. All of us have flunked the test that God has placed before us. None of us can follow Jesus to heaven by walking as He walked, but we get to dwell there anyway. We get to be with Jesus. Now, Peter had an advantage on us in one respect. He knew what being with Jesus would be like. I don't. I've never so much as seen my Lord, and to tell you the truth, it's a frightening thought in some ways. What would someone so good think of the likes of me? But folks, Jesus doesn't want to spend eternity with only the perfect. He wants to spend it with the likes of you and me.

III. I Am the Way.

- A. Jesus continues this discussion in John 14:4-6. He begins with one of those typically cryptic comments that Jesus loved to make, a comment that is designed to invite a question. He tells his disciples that even though they can't follow Him, they both know where He is going and how to get there.
- B. Now we see Thomas showing that he's not really listening closely. He's heard the bit about Jesus going to His Father's house, but Thomas hasn't put two and two together yet. He just hears Jesus say that the disciples both know the destination and how to get there, and a buzzer goes off in his head that says, "Whoa! Hold on here! I don't know where Jesus is going yet!" That's why he raises the apparently logical point of 14:5.
- C. Jesus' reply to this is another very classically Christlike thing to say because it's so outside-the-box. When we talk about a way to get somewhere, we're generally talking about directions: Turn left at the Dairy Queen, right at the boot shop, and so on and so forth. Jesus, though, says that the way to heaven can't be found on a map. Instead, He Himself is the way. He is the way, in that if we follow Him, we can come to the Father. He is the truth, in that only what He says can be spiritually relied upon to bring us to the Father. He is the life, in that unless we follow Him to the Father, we will die in our sins like the Jews of John 8.
- D. Brethren, we need to understand just how critically important this makes Jesus to all of us. The early church definitely knew how important this was. In fact, in the book of Acts, other than the word "church" itself, "the Way" is the most common term used to describe God's people. Consider, for instance, its use in Acts 9:1-2. It was so common that even the enemies of the church used it. This tells us that what it means to be a Christian is to strive to be like Jesus, not in the way we just toss it off without thinking sometimes, but in the sense of being daily, passionately committed to making our character and our lives exactly like His character and His life. When we fail in that, He is still the way through our belief in Him. That's our only path to God.

Conclusion. If you want to come to the Father, you need to take Jesus for your way today.