

In Christ Alone

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[0 : 0 0] This morning is taken from John 14 and verse 6. Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Let's pray it again. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that your word is truth. We thank you that it's trustworthy and reliable. We thank you that it points us to Jesus Christ.

We ask that as we open your word that your Holy Spirit would be our teacher and that your glory would be our chief concern. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

The traveller stood by the signpost. He was weary. He was tired. He was confused. All around him radiating out in different directions were a whole host of different paths. A dense fog had shrouded the hillside. It was thick and impenetrable. The signpost itself was so weather-beaten that it had become quite illegible. Which way should I go? He asked.

I want to find my way to the city of God, but there are so many paths, so many different ways which is the right one. As he pondered his problem, three travellers came up behind him, travelling on the same road by which he had arrived. Excuse me, he said to the first, can you help me? I'm trying to find my way to the city of God. Grunted the man.

[2 : 0 4] You don't believe in any of that rubbish, do you? These are roads all lead nowhere. All that talk about a city of God, mythological claptrap. If you take my advice, you'll just pitch your tent here by the signpost and make the best of what you've got. The travellers' face fell at the skeptic's words. But rather than give up, he decided to speak to the second of the travellers who by that time had reached the signpost. Excuse me, he said, I wonder if you can help me? I'm trying to find the road that will take me to the city of God.

This time the man simply shrugged his shoulders, uncertainly. Who can say, he answered, maybe it's this road, maybe it's that road. You can't possibly know which is the right one.

All you can really do is be open-minded and tolerant. Just you choose whatever path seems right to you. I would never dream of imposing my views on anyone else. Well, the traveller thanked the man for his advice, though privately he had hoped for a little more precise guidance.

Perhaps the third man would be able to help him a little more. Excuse me, I wonder if you can help me? Can you tell me the way to the city of God? Well, this time his fellow pilgrim smiled back at him. Ah, friend, that is an unnecessary question. For all roads lead to the city of God, they only appear to go in different directions. Out there beyond the mist and the fog, they all circle back on themselves and converge on your desired destination. Follow whatever one you wish. You'll get there in the end. At this, the traveller frowned, unconvinced. Was it likely that roads to the same destination all started going out in radically opposite ways? Surely it was just as possible to take a wrong road as it was a right road. Which is the right way? Then suddenly out of the fog came a fourth man. Unlike the others, he did not come up the same path that the others had used. Instead, he came down one of the other tracks, a steep and narrow one. Excuse me, said the traveller one more time, could you possibly help me? I'm looking for the city of God. One person has told me that there's no such place. Another has told me to be open-minded about the question. And a third has assured me that all roads lead there. Can you tell me the right way? Indeed, I can, said the stranger. Those you have spoken to were really only guessing or speculating. They've never been to the city of God, so they can only guess about the route. I, however, live there. The city of God is my home. So come and follow me, for I am the way. There is perhaps no aspect of Christianity that is more offensive to the modern mind than its exclusivity. Why do Christians claim that Jesus is the only way to God? Why do Christians claim that no one else will do in a world of so many different religious alternatives, each held with great devotion and commitment? Why do Christians insist that it must be Jesus? Of course, there are many reasons why Christians make this claim for Jesus Christ. But perhaps the most obvious of them is simply this. This is what Jesus himself claimed. If one reads through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, what you discover is that again and again and again Jesus makes extraordinary, even outrageous claims for himself. Most religious leaders point away from themselves. You want to find God, they ask, well, go to that holy place, go to that holy shrine, read that holy book, adopt this religious discipline. Jesus Christ said this, He said, come to me. He said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[7 : 13] I mean, who does He think He is? Who do you think He is? C.S. Lewis put it like this, Jesus made claims which if not true are those of a megalomaniac, compared to whom Hitler was the most sane and humble of men. There is no halfway house and there is no parallel in other religions. The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is simply out of the question. For a moment this morning, I want to focus on just one of perhaps one of the most famous claims that Jesus ever made for himself. We'll have heard many of us will have heard it before. It is in fact the motto of Glasgow University, via Veritas Vita. Find it in John 14.6. Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. The context here is that Jesus is preparing to go to the cross and to His death. His disciples, His most intimate followers, they are anxious, they are bewildered, they are trying to make sense of what is going on, they are fearful, they are upset, they don't really know what is happening. Jesus speaks to them, he tries to reassure them and he speaks to them of going to the Father, which is another way of speaking about going to heaven and going to be with God. He wants them to know that this is why he will have to die on the cross. He is going to prepare a place for them through

His death and through His resurrection. But the disciples, they just don't get it. They cannot see and they cannot understand what Jesus is doing. Just as many people today can't quite understand who Jesus is and what it is he has come to do. So with these words, Jesus kind of spells it out. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So what I want to do for a moment or two this morning is look at this threefold claim that Jesus makes here. And the first part of that claim is this, is that Jesus is the way. Jesus is the way. What is he saying here? He is saying that he alone is the way to God. That's what Jesus taught and that is in fact what His followers proclaimed. Acts 4 verse 12, there is salvation and no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Here in John 14 he tells his disciples, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. No one comes to the Father except through me. And perhaps the image here, the picture is of life as a journey. We are travelling along a way. It's a kind of self-evident truth of human experience. We know that life doesn't stand still. We may try and ignore it and blot it from our minds but nonetheless it's an inescapable fact. Time moves on and we move with it. We may try and disguise the ageing process. Face creams, beauty treatments, hair dye, mascara, Botox, lipstick, that's just the men. But we can't stop the clock. We can't hold back that tide of time that relentlessly crashes against the shores of our lives. We may resent it, we may deny it, we may even disguise it. But when all is said and done, we cannot escape it. We're all on a journey through life. And the Bible tells us that on that journey we are lost. We've lost our bearings, we've lost our moral direction, we've lost that sense of purpose and destiny for which we were made by God. The prophet Isaiah says, we all like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And Jesus in the Gospels told stories like the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost sons to illustrate this aspect of the human condition. Because on the journey through life human beings are not where we should be in relation to our Creator, to the one who made us our God. And as a consequence you know people just drift through life, little sense of purpose, direction, drift through school, drift into college, university, drift into a job, drift in and out of relationships.

Through it all there's no integrating factor. We drift through, but the truth is we're not going to drift forever. According to Jesus our lives have a destination. One day the journey will come to an end. And what then? None of us can avoid the reality of death and an appointment with our Creator. It's Woody Allen who spoke for many when he said, it's not that I'm afraid to die, it's just that I don't want to be there when it happens.

Because at the end of the journey there is an appointment with God. And that is one appointment we will not fail to keep. It's unavoidable. One day according to the Bible we will have to give an account to the one who made us, who created us. And that's why our greatest need is to come and know this God. The forgiveness of the one before whom we will have to stand. And that's why Jesus describes his mission as coming to seek and to save that which was lost. When Jesus says to us, I am the way, he's not claiming to give us the best directions to God. He's not simply claiming to point the way. He, his claim is that he himself is the way. There's a story told of a traveller in the Middle East who engaged a guide to take him across some dangerous strip of desert. And when the two men arrived at the edge of the desert, the traveller looked ahead and saw before him this vast expanse of trackless sands without a footprint, without a path, without a marker.

Turning to his guide he asked with a tone of surprise, where is the road? With a reproving glance the guide replied, I am the road. This is what Jesus is saying here. I am the road.

[14 : 45] I am the way to God. It's through him and only through him that human beings can come to know the Father. He is the door into the kingdom of God. If you want to come to God, you must come through me, says Jesus. If you want to come to God with all your cares, you must come through me. If you want to come to God and confess your sin, you must come through me. If you want to draw close to God, you must come through me. And the good news for whoever we are this morning is that this road is here. This way is here. This way this road has been built. It's been constructed in a sense. Where does it begin? Where do we get on that road? The old story of the man travelling across the wilds of Ireland, making his way to Dublin, stopped and asked an elderly gentleman by the roadside if he could give him directions.

The old man told him, I had to be sure if I was going to Dublin. I wouldn't be starting from here. And that can be true for lots of us. Sometimes we think, if I wanted to go to God, I wouldn't start from here. But here is where it starts for all of us. The road is right at your feet this morning. Maybe we're in a place where we know we shouldn't be. Perhaps we strayed into it. Maybe we've fallen into it. Maybe we've foolishly chosen it ourselves.

Maybe we'd give anything not to be where we are this morning. Well, listening to me, that might be understandable. But the great thing is this. The great thing is this, this that exactly from where you are in your life today, exactly from where you are this morning, there is a road, there is a way that leads to God. It leads to His glory, His love, His embrace and His forgiveness. Exactly from where you are. You may be defeated, you may be depressed, you may be confused, you may be worried, you may be tired, you may be guilty. Sometimes as you know, we think, you know, there can't possibly be a road to God from where I am.

Not after what I've done, not after the mess I've made of my life. But Jesus says to us here, I am the way from where you are to where God is. Those who come to me, He says, will find their journey's end in the very presence of God. Jesus is the way. Secondly here, Jesus is the truth. It was the Russian nuclear physicist, Andrei Sakharov, who once said that the most powerful weapon in the world is truth. Winston Churchill said that the truth is so valuable, so precious that it's often protected by a bodyguard of lies. And here in our text, Jesus simply says, you know, I am the truth. The Bible tells us that as human beings, we have suppressed the truth about God and we have swallowed a lie. That's what Paul, for example, teaches in Romans chapter 1 that we've exchanged, swapped the truth about God for a lie and that we're content to worship created things rather than our Creator. Some of you will know what it's like to have been lied to. If somebody lies to you and you discover that, you feel betrayed. We live in a world that is constantly betraying us. We think that all manner of created things will satisfy us and make us whole, make us happy, but they don't. As hard as we try and grab hold of meaning and purpose in the things of this world, they slip through our fingers like grains of sand. Remember how Burns put it?

The pleasures are like poppy spread. You seize the flower, the bloom is shed, or like the snow falls in the river, a moment white then melts forever. So what does Jesus mean when he says here, I am the truth? It is a claim, I think, to be the truth that alone can satisfy.

[19 : 44] He is the revelation of the Creator God. If you want to know the truth about God, you need to look to Jesus. Indeed, this is what Jesus speaks about in these verses. Philip says, Lord show us the Father, it will be enough for us. Jesus says, you know, I have been with you so long, you don't know me Philip. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Elsewhere in the New Testament Paul speaks of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He talks about Jesus being the image of the invisible God. He is saying God's glory is to be seen in Jesus. If you want to think about God, you need to look to Jesus. Because in the mighty acts of Jesus that we read about in the gospels, we are seeing pictures of God Himself at work. Stilling the storm, healing the sick, casting out demons, washing His disciples' feet, bleeding and dying on a cross. This is the truth about God. And that truth is Jesus. But kind of God do we have. We have one who for our sakes entered into our poverty and pain and took our place. The Bible says that we have a God of extravagant love who died in our place. One who knew no sin and yet who became sin for us. So in a world of lies, a world that continually betrays us, Jesus Christ is the truth about

God. And he's not only the truth about God, he's also the truth about human beings. He's the truth about us. He was fully human. He was the perfect man. Purity and perfection of His life is something that's noted, acknowledged by skeptics and believers alike. It's interesting to read that even the followers of other faiths and religions, their assessment of the life of Jesus almost without exception, they acknowledge His unparalleled goodness. The Irish historian, W. E. H. Lecky, no friend of Christianity, wrote a good number of years ago these words.

The character of Jesus has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice and has exerted so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the ample record of His three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists. The word sincere comes from two Latin words that mean without wax. In the ancient world, a sculptor, perhaps he was in a hurry, would sometimes use wax in order to more quickly shape the figure. The warm wax would be added to the stone, which could be more easily sculpted into the required shape. The authentic and pure stone statue was known as sincere without wax. Jesus Christ is the authentic human life, sincere without wax. When you look at Jesus, you are looking at a life like no other. No one ever lived like Him. Compare His life with that of any other religious leader. It is quite simply extraordinary why He is the truth. He is the truth about God, He is the truth about ourselves, the genuine article, fully human, fully divine. I am the way and the truth and the life. The theme of life is a very prominent one. If you read through the Gospel of John, indeed

John begins his Gospel speaking about Jesus as the life in him was life, and the life was the light of men, he says in verse 4 of the opening chapter. Later on in the Gospel, Jesus says in John 10, 10, I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly. At the grave of Lazarus, he proclaimed, I am the resurrection and the life. At the close of his Gospel, John writes this, John 20:31, now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. Jesus claimed to be the one who brought life to human beings, human beings dead in sin and rebellion against God. A world characterised and dominated by death – Jesus says, I am the life. John 17, he says, this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. The eternal life which Jesus brings and embodies is to do with a relationship with God. That life comes to us through Jesus' death on the cross, and it comes through experiencing the forgiveness of God, won by Jesus in his death and resurrection, and Jesus' death on the cross. It's very different. For example, to that of other religious leaders, Moses died at 120, Buddha at 80, Confucius at 72,

Mohammed at 62, Old Age, amidst popular reclaim, spending most of their lives passing on their teaching to others. How different is Christianity? Jesus died at 33, teaching ministry of but three years, rejected by his own countrymen, betrayed and denied by his own disciples, mocked by his opponents. The Bible says abandoned and forsaken even by God himself. His death by one of the most agonising forms of execution ever devised by man. He didn't die in old age, didn't die after a long teaching ministry, didn't die amidst popular reclaim. His death was premature, it was tragic, it was lonely, it was on a cross of shame, despised and rejected by men. The Bible says a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And so how did this man who ended his life in such utter shame and disgrace and rejection become the most important and influential human being this world has ever known?

[27 : 44] At the last meal he had with his disciples on the very eve of his death. Jesus took a cup of wine. He said, this is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus understood that his death was special. It wasn't going to be a martyr, it wasn't going to be just a victim of a tragic event. He understood that his death had a very definite purpose. This is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. We know that it's a costly thing at times to forgive someone. The most common reaction when someone is wronged us is perhaps to fly off the handle, maybe to lose the rag or become indignant.

That kind of reaction invariably causes a rift or a gulf that can sometimes last a long time. But there's another way of dealing with personal hurt or injury. That is the way of love. While love cannot pretend there is no anger or hurt or pain, it does have the amazing capacity to absorb it and bring from it reconciliation. There's a sense that they're on the cross, that is the way that God chose to act. This is my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.

God is angry and hurt because as human beings we have broken his rules, exchanging the truth about him for a lie, rejecting his moral order, abusing his standards. And yet rather than unleash his justice and his anger against us, he's opened the door of forgiveness and reconciliation.

At great cost he's taken that wrath and anger upon himself. That's what happened at the death of Jesus. That's why no one else could do. God had to do it himself. Bible says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself in that mysterious complexity that Christians call the trinity. God was absorbing into himself all his own anger and hurt that a sinful world had caused him. Jesus the life offered himself as a sacrifice and gave himself to death that we, that you might have life with God. He who dies condemned in the place of others enables others to live forgiven lives. There's a story told about a fire that took place in a village in Africa. The village was constructed of huts made of vegetation, branches, so forth. And there was one night there was a fire that took place in one of these huts and it very quickly consumed the entire construct. And all who were in there were killed except for one little baby boy because as the fire had taken hold, someone had been walking past. They'd managed to snatch this little infant from the flames and rescue it. And the infant had been laying, laid at the centre of the village. And as everyone gathered, they were astounded that this babe had been rescued. And there was a kind of competition to see who should adopt it and look after it. So obviously it had been blessed, especially rescued in this way. And people were, as the village people gathered, the people were competing as to why they should have the claim on the baby. One said, well, I have got many wives,

I'll be able to look after. One said, well, I've got many cattle, I'm rich. One said, well, I'm a prince, I come from a, and so forth. And as they were having this debate, a man came out from the crowd and he said, I claim the child. And the people looked at him, he was a bit of a nobody, a bit of a nothing. Why, why should he have the child?

[33 : 14] Who was he? What's the basis of your claim? And then the man lifted up his hands, scarred, burnt, charred hands. Here is my claim. Friends, we may have respect and rightly so for other religious leaders and teachers, but friends only Jesus Christ has the scars on his hands.

This is my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Yes, others may claim to teach and instruct and edify, but only Jesus claims to save. No one else can save us. No one else can rescue us. No one else can bring you to God. Only the one who is the way and the truth and the life. Through that fog of human ignorance and failure, it is Jesus who emerges from the road alone. The scars on his hands. He says to you as he says to me this morning, I am the way and the truth and the life. Come and follow me. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would imprint upon our minds and our hearts the truth. Jesus is the truth. Jesus alone is the way and that Jesus alone is the one in whom eternal life is to be found. Help us to rest our confidence in him and to draw from him all that we need to be his people and his followers in this world. We ask it in his strong and precious name. Amen.