

Exegesis

Vs. 5-6 – “Thomas saith unto him, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?”” Thomas, speaking for the group (“we”), had no idea what Jesus was talking about, yet it is to his credit that he was willing to admit his ignorance. Thomas would rather be thought of as daft than miss Jesus' point.

However, the disciples weren't as lost as they thought. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” This marks the sixth of seven ‘I am’ statements in John's account (cf. 6:35; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 15:1).¹ And while all those sayings are vital to our understanding of Christ's identity, it is hard to overemphasize the importance of this one. Jesus' words here have so shaped Christianity that, although to outsiders it was first known as “Christianity” (cf. Ac. 11:26), to insiders, it was first referred to simply as “the Way” (cf. Ac. 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), a likely call back to this very passage.²

But how are we to understand Jesus' words? Given this is a direct response to Thomas' question about “the way” the Lord is going, plus “the way” comes first in the sequence of those three terms, and “the Way” became synonymous with early Christianity, we can safely assume that “the way” must be of prime importance. So, does this mean “the truth and the life” are supposed to explain the nature of “the way,” as if Jesus were clarifying what he means by saying something like he was “the true and living way” or he is the “the true way of life”?³ Or are they supposed to be understood independently without being totally separated, as in, “truth” and “life” act in a supporting role for “the way”?⁴ Considering that all three terms have their own article (“the”), it seems best to understand each word separately without totally separating them from their siblings.⁵ In other words, each word has something unique to contribute to the overall identity of Jesus.⁶ And so, what follows below is an explanation of what Jesus *literally* meant when he said he was “the way, the truth, and the life.” By studying

¹ A mnemonic device that may help you remember the seven I am saying is, “Billy loosed giant sheep round West Virginia.”

² Köstenberger (2008), p. 428.

³ Keener (2012), 2:943.

⁴ Klink (2016), p. 617.

⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 345; Köstenberger (2008), p. 429; Carson (1991), p. 491, explains that Greek expresses subordination in other ways than what is used here. Meaning “the three terms are syntactically coordinate” and should be interpreted as such. Morris (1995), p. 570, says the three terms are “coordinate,” meaning they are equal in rank and importance.

⁶ Morris (1995), p. 570, ““Way,” “truth,” and “life” all have relevance, the triple expression emphasizing the many-sidedness of the saving work.”

what each term means, we'll avoid leaving this profound statement to the realm of abstract thought, unable to see how we might apply Jesus' words.⁷ After all, exegesis ought to lend to application because it is *impossible* to properly apply the Scriptures if we do not correctly understand the Scriptures. Or, as Mark Ward puts it, "Edification requires intelligibility."

When Jesus says he is "the way," he is saying that he is the *means* itself, that the only *access* to God is *through* him. He is the door where there was no door before (cf. 10:1, 7, 9).⁸ Christianity is not tolerant nor inclusive in this regard (cf. Ac. 4:12). Like a lone light on a dark horizon, Jesus stands in striking relief against the backdrop of a hopeless existence (cf. 1:5). Though only a few may find it, he beckons all to come to him; but, make no mistake, the called must come on *his* terms, by *his* direction, according to *his* way. The path to Jesus does not meander; it is "straight;" it is not wide, but "narrow" (cf. Mat. 7:13-14). No philosophy or belief system has the same claim that Christianity does. There are no other roads that lead to God. And, just in case that wasn't clear enough, Jesus even says, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." There are not multiple ways to heaven; there is only *one* way, and his name is Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 10:20).

When Jesus says he is "the truth," he is saying that he is *reality* itself, that the only *real* thing in the universe is him. John noted in 1:3, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Flip a mountain on its side, and you will find "Made by Jesus" stamped with indelible ink by its roots (cf. Ps. 19:1-2). He is the one by whom the worlds were created and by whom we continue to exist (Heb. 1:3). Jesus is *the first mover*; he sets into motion movement; he puts the planets into orbit. The Lord is *the first cause*; he tips the first piece in a chain reaction; he lights the match that ignites stars. Gravitational forces persist because the Lord has not given them leave to stop. Truth, be it from the spiritual or physical realm, cannot be found apart from the Son of God. Christians insist that 'all truth is God's truth' for good reason. If we should happen upon some new discovery, we (perhaps) might take some credit for finding it, but we would never take credit for *making* it. Old, new, and undiscovered truths all bear the marks of their Creator, Jesus Christ.

When Jesus says he is "the life," he is saying that he is *existence* itself, that life does not and cannot *exist* apart from him. Like a candle without a flame, life has no light, meaning, or purpose if Jesus is absent from our lives. The Lord alone animates and energizes our very being. Without him, we become lifeless husks, ghouls who experience a dull and listless

⁷ Klink (2016), p. 618.

⁸ Keener (2012), 2:943, "Given John's polemic, however, we should note that his exclusivity is not a claim that other ways to the Father existed and Jesus closed them off. The claim is more universal than that: given the world's alienation from God, there was no way to the Father, and Jesus provided one (3:18-19; cf. 1:10; 1 Jn. 5:19).

existence. But *with him*, we become children again, adolescents who experience a vibrant and driven life (cf. 3:3). As John said in his prelude, "In him was *life*; and the *life* was the *light* of men....[and] as many as received him, to them gave he *power* to become the sons of God, even to them that *believe* on his name..." (1:4, 12). "Life," "light," and "power" are found at the hand of the Son of God, and he gives them freely to all those who put their *faith* in him. He gives us breath and keeps us breathing (cf. Gen. 2:7). He gives us thought and keeps us thinking (cf. Psa. 139:13-14). He gives us life and keeps us living (cf. Deut. 32:39). Listen to a baby's first cry, and you will also hear the Life-Giver singing. Smell the first flowers of spring, and you will smell his sweet fragrance. Savor a season's first fruit, and you'll taste of the One who gives life to every tree, bush, and plant; you will delight in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At this point, Thomas à Kempis is quoted by many when they talk about this passage. And this is for good reason, as his meditations on Jesus' words are quite moving:

"Follow me. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without the Way, there is no going. Without the Truth, there is no knowing. Without the Life, there is no living. I am the Way which you must follow, the Truth which you must believe, the Life for which you must hope. I am the inviolable⁹ Way, the infallible Truth, the unending Life....If you abide in My Way, you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free, and you shall attain life everlasting."¹⁰

Vs. 7 – The Lord finished answering Thomas, saying, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." Thomas admitted he didn't know the place or "the way" Jesus was going (vs. 5), but he and the rest of the disciples would freely admit that they knew Jesus. But Jesus' conditional phrasing ("if") puts even that assumption in doubt. To be sure, they knew Jesus as well as they could, but still, their understanding was lacking, as will be shortly evidenced by Phillip's question (vs. 8). It will only be *after* the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that Christ's identity will be fully revealed and realized for them. Only then will they discover that in knowing Jesus, they always knew "the way" and the "Father."

But Jesus also claims that they've "seen" the very face of God. This is why John said in 1:18, "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Jesus Christ is the commentary of God, the "narration of God,"¹¹

⁹ Inviolable means never to be broken, infringed, or dishonored.

¹⁰ Kempis, Thomas à, *The Imitation of Christ*, Hendrickson Christian Classics, (Peabody, Mass; Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), p. 124. Thomas à Kempis, aka Thomas Haemerken, was a 15th-century monk. *Imitation of Christ* is regarded as the most widely distributed book in history after the Bible.

¹¹ Carson (1991), p. 135.

or, as Kenner puts it, "...in Jesus...God had come unveiled."¹² Jesus Christ is the best and last revelation of God. To see the Son is to see the Father.

Interestingly, the idea of "knowing" God, in the mind of a first-century Jew, was thought of as something that would only fully be achieved in the *future*.¹³ But, for the Christian, God is and can be known in the *present* through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus' teachings and John's writings are as much for the today as they are for tomorrow. Or, as our faithful narrator will say in one of his other books, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 Jn. 5:13). Knowing Jesus is the only thing in life worth knowing.

¹² Keener (2012), 2:944.

¹³ Köstenberger (2008), p. 430; Morris (1995), p. 571.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 46

Text: John 14:5-7

In his gospel account, John has seven so-called "I am" statements, and tonight we'll explore the sixth. Jesus declares that he is "the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And while all seven sayings are vital to our understanding of Christ's identity, it is hard to overemphasize the importance of this one. Jesus' words here have so shaped Christianity that, although to outsiders it was first known as "Christianity" (cf. Ac. 11:26), to insiders, it was first referred to simply as "the Way" (cf. Ac. 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), a likely call back to this very passage. Thus, it is only fitting that we try to fully comprehend what Jesus meant when he said this. After all, exegesis ought to lend to application because it is *impossible* to properly apply the Scriptures if we don't correctly understand the Scriptures. And if there is one verse every Christian should understand, it is John 14:6.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: