

SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2010

Sunday, April 11, 2010: Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life

Jesus: The Way, Truth and Life
John 14: 1 – 14.

I. Introduction.

Why do you read the Bible? Perhaps I am making an assumption about you. Do you read the Bible? I am assuming that you do, because you are worshipping in a Baptist Church. One of the distinctive things about Baptists is what we believe about the Bible. The Bible is the authority for our church and the authority for our families and individual lives.

Perhaps that would be your answer. “I read the Bible, because it is the authority for my life.” That would be a good answer, but that is not what I am asking.

A better question might be: What do you expect to receive when you read the Bible? I mean, do you turn to the Bible expecting to find something in particular?

There are several good answers to this question. Some people turn to the Bible to find direction for their lives. Some people read the Bible as a source for peace or comfort in troubled times. Some people read the Bible as a book of instructions—when all else fails, read the instructions.

For the past seven weeks, we have read Jesus’ “I am” statements in the Gospel of John. These seven statements are unique to the Gospel of John. They give us an insight into what Jesus believed and taught about himself. In a lot of ways, these seven statements help us to clarify the nature of Jesus by exploring his claims. Jesus claimed to be God. Jesus claimed to be the Savior of all who believe in him. The church did not later invent the idea of Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus taught it to both his disciples and to the crowds of people who listened to him.

These seven “I am” statements are doctrinal statements. As doctrinal statements, they do not fit neatly into the claim that the Bible is an instructional manual. Jesus’ words about himself do not contain instructions. Why would we read Jesus’ words about himself? What can we receive from these passages?

In John 20, we read a passage that explains why this Gospel was written and explains what we should expect from the Bible. **“Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20: 29 – 31 NIV).”**

Aha! THIS is why the Bible was written. THIS is why we read the Bible. THIS is what we can expect to receive when we read the Bible.

The Bible—especially the New Testament—was written by men who had lived with Jesus. They had seen him with their eyes, heard him with their ears, touched him with their hands. These men had experienced Jesus before the crucifixion and after the resurrection. They had an experience that changed their lives. They wrote down their experience with Jesus in order that we might have the

same experience they had.

While it is certainly true that the Bible contains passages that can be used for direction, peace, comfort and instruction in life, this is not the primary reason we read the Bible. We read the Bible to experience Jesus—the ultimate revelation of God himself.

With that in mind, let's read John 14, expecting to experience Jesus in these words...

Read John 14: 1 – 14.

The first words of this passage sound like words from a funeral message. There is a good reason to make this association. On one hand, these are some comforting words to people who have experienced loss as a result of death. On the other hand, these words were spoken by Jesus to a group of men who were also experiencing loss.

Jesus had just told his disciples that he was about to leave them. They had given their lives to Jesus for the past several years. Peter, Andrew, James and John had left their families and their businesses for Jesus. They had given up everything. And, now Jesus is about to abandon them.

Jesus had just told his disciples that one of them would be his betrayer. These twelve men had been close to Jesus and probably close to each other. It was more than they could comprehend to think one of these close friends would hand Jesus over to death. How could this happen?

Jesus had just told his disciples that Peter would act more like a coward than a rock. Peter would be so afraid that he would first run away, then deny ever knowing Jesus...Much less leaving his fishing business to become a disciple. Peter is not a coward. How could this be?

It is important to notice a contrast in Jesus' words. Jesus speaks about a post Easter hope. However, these words were spoken before the crucifixion.

You and I can find peace and comfort from Jesus' words, because we know about Easter. We know that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep. We know that Jesus is the One who demonstrated the greatest form of love, by laying down his life for his friends. But, we also know that is not the end of the story. We also know that Jesus laid down his life in order to take it up again. We know that Jesus promised that his resurrection leads to the resurrection of all who believe in him.

The disciples were living in a pre-Easter world and were not ready for post-Easter hope. This explains Thomas' question. In our post-Easter world, it is very comforting to hear Jesus say, **“If I go to 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.”**

II. The Way.

Notice that Jesus did not tell his disciples that they know the place where he is going. Jesus merely said, “You know the way.” Jesus didn't say anything about the destination. Jesus only talked about the way.

Of course, the disciples were preoccupied with the destination. They wanted to know the destination. Jesus' destination would one day be the disciples' destination. But, Jesus never talked about the destination. He only talked about the way.

We see this in Thomas' question. "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Disparaging Thomas is one of our favorite Christian pastimes. If anyone else had spoken these words, we would interpret them differently. Yet, Thomas is a "doubter," so we like to discredit his words and interpret them as a sign of his growing doubts about Jesus.

I don't think these words indicate doubt. Instead, I think Thomas speaks for most of us. We want to know where we are going before we get on the road. Where we are going determines which road we get on. You can't drive to Nacogdoches on Highway 69. You can't drive to Beaumont on Highway 59. We need to know where we are going before we get on the road.

I interpret Jesus' answer to Thomas' question as a reinterpretation about the way and the destination. It is true that the destination determines which road to take. However, it is also true that the road determines the destination. Jesus is the way. Jesus is the road. Wherever Jesus leads us is the right destination.

Jesus' words in John 14: 6, are often used to demonstrate the exclusive nature of the Christian faith. While I believe Jesus is the only way to the Father, I also find Jesus' words to be very inclusive as well. Jesus did not say, "I am the way, and only the Jews will make it to Heaven." Jesus did not say, "I am the way, and only the morally upright will be saved." Jesus did not say, "I am the way, and only the people who attend the right church will have eternal life."

Jesus' words are exclusive in the way he defines salvation through Jesus and no other way. But, Jesus' words are inclusive in the way he refuses to affix any other form of righteousness to salvation. In other words, Jesus is the way for all races—both Jew and Gentile; red and yellow, black and white. Jesus is the way for all sinners—good works can not save anyone. Jesus is the way for all religions—your church membership does not save you.

Many of us are guilty of adding an extra word to Jesus' statement. We like to interpret Jesus' statement as if Jesus said, "I am in the way." Jesus is the way for all people to be saved. Jesus is not in the way, preventing anyone from having eternal life.

Look at the life of Jesus as an example. The Gospels tell us that Jesus reached out to everyone. Jews and Gentiles came to Jesus. Religious people and reputed sinners came to Jesus. Sick people and well people came to Jesus. Men and women came to Jesus. And, Jesus never turned anyone away.

Yes. This is an exclusive claim that no one can be saved without Jesus. But, it is also inclusive...Anyone can be saved with Jesus.

III. The Truth.

Jesus did not only claim to be the way. Jesus claimed to be the truth. These are two offensive claims in the Twenty-First Century. How can anyone in the Twenty-First Century be so narrow-minded to believe in only one way to salvation and only one truth? After all, isn't truth subjective? The same truth cannot be applied to all people.

Jesus' claim to be the truth ought to be compared with his life and teachings. In the Gospel of John, Jesus demonstrated himself in a series of miraculous signs. Jesus taught his disciples and the crowds about his unity with God. Jesus did nothing out of his own will or initiative. Jesus performed signs, taught the people and ultimately laid down his life in obedience to God's will.

Jesus is the truth, because Jesus reveals God. The miracles demonstrate that Jesus had power over nature—even power over life and death, as the resurrection of Lazarus shows us. Jesus claimed to be One with God. He claimed to be the Son of God. And, now he tells us that to see Jesus is the see God. This would be a very difficult thing to accept without the evidence of the miracles—especially the miracle of Jesus' own resurrection.

Again, Jesus' words were spoken to a pre-Easter world. Today, we hear Jesus' words in a post-Easter world. The difference between hearing Jesus' words before Easter and after Easter is that today we can test Jesus' claims. If Jesus was never resurrected, then we have plenty of reasons not to believe him. If Jesus was resurrected, we need to take his words seriously.

Many people have made claims that Jesus never rose again. The greatest argument against the resurrection has always been, "Stuff like that doesn't happen." There is no historical evidence to discredit the resurrection.

The Jews could not produce the dead body of Jesus. We know that after the crucifixion Jesus' body was placed in a tomb. We know that Roman soldiers stood guard at the entrance to the tomb. This tells us people knew where the tomb was located. This tells us that if Jesus' body was still in the tomb it would have been found.

The disciples started preaching the Gospel of Jesus in the city of Jerusalem. The citizens of Jerusalem were the same people who had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. These people had seen Jesus die with their own eyes. The people of Jerusalem were the least likely to believe that Jesus had been resurrected. Yet, just a few days after the resurrection, three thousand people believed.

The disciples were different after the resurrection. How can we explain the change in James, the brother of Jesus? Before Jesus died, James did not believe. After the resurrection, James gave his life for Jesus. How can we explain the change in Peter? Before the crucifixion, Peter was a coward, who ran away and denied Jesus. After the resurrection, Peter preached with power. Both James and Peter were executed for their belief in Jesus' resurrection. Did they die for something that never happened? Why didn't they recant?

Jesus is the truth, not because he only told the truth. Jesus is the truth, because he has revealed God to us. God loves us so much that he provided the only way for humans to be saved. It took a cross and a resurrection. This is the only truth that truly matters. This is the truth by which all other claims to truth ought to be judged.

IV. The Life.

Life is a recurring and consistent theme in the Gospel of John. Jesus came so that we might have life more abundantly. You were not created to have an adequate life. God wants you to live a thrilling and fulfilled life. God wants you to have life to the fullest extent...Abundant Life. There are three things we can say about Abundant Life...

1. Abundant Life is Knowing and Being Known... Through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, you can know God and be known by God. God is not a distant and detached God. God knows you by name and wants to be in relationship with you. God is concerned about every aspect of your life, from the biggest decisions you make to the days when you don't feel like going to work. Imagine how horrible it would be to live in complete anonymity. We all want to be known by others. Jesus gives us an opportunity to be known by God.

2. Abundant Life is Having a Purpose... Jesus saves us from sin, but that is not all. Jesus saves us from sin and saves us for a mission to the world. It would be terribly selfish for us to think that Jesus saves us so that we can brag about being God's people. This is similar to the mistake the Jews made. They had forgotten that God had given them an assignment to be a blessing to the entire world. They thought God had saved them to sit there. God doesn't save anyone to sit there. God saves us to continue the work of Jesus in the world. On one hand, this is a Gospel mission—to share the story of Jesus so others can be saved. On the other hand, this is a mission of love. God calls us to be outwardly focused...Not focused entirely on ourselves as individuals or focused only on our church. We are to leave the walls of the church to serve the world and to bring others to Jesus as the door.

3. Abundant Life is Freedom... In the Old Testament, we read about God's standards for his people. We know by personal experience that no one can fully live up to God's expectations. Therefore, we live in fear of God's wrath. The cross of Christ tells us that we don't have to face the wrath of God. Those who have faith in Jesus have God's assurance that he is not angry with us anymore and will never be angry again. This is true freedom. If God is not angry with us, then the Law, sin, death and Satan no longer have any power over us. Their power over us comes in the form of fear and guilt. Jesus gives us the freedom to live without fear and guilt. Abundant Life is a life free from fear and guilt.

The only way to have this kind of life is with Jesus...

V. Conclusion.

Back to the concept of experience...Jesus did not teach us that the way, the truth and the life are about information. There will be no test after you die to determine how much information you have understood. No. The way, the truth and the life are a Person—Jesus. The only way to have salvation, truth and life—both abundant and eternal life—is through a relationship with a Person.

The claims of Jesus demand a decision. Either we believe his words and commit our lives to a relationship with Jesus, or we reject him entirely. There is no room in the middle.

We have lost some of this in the Twenty-First Century church. We come to church on Sunday mornings and wonder why we are not as strong as we once were. In the battle between church and culture, it seems that the culture is winning. And the culture is winning. Today, the culture has more influence on the church than the church has on the culture. The reason? We have compromised the message of Jesus.

We are more concerned with political correctness than the Gospel and the claims Jesus made about himself. We are more interested in making people happy than making people holy. We are more concerned about saving face than saving souls.

Yes. These are exclusive claims. Jesus is the only WAY to be saved; Jesus is the only TRUTH that

matters; Jesus is the source of true LIFE. But this is inclusive as well. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life for us...And for anyone who believes in him.