



from the desk of . . .  
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**#796**  
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**I AM - 5**

## **I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE**

**John 14:1-6**

Back in the mid 1970's, I was living in Indiana, PA, (this was after serving in the Army but before going to Seminary). I was very active in my Church.

I also was part-owner of a restaurant,  
& worked for the local newspaper.

I had become friends with a couple of businessmen, who were also believers: one was an insurance man & the other owned a home remodeling company. We decided to get together every Wednesday at lunchtime for prayer & Bible study. We met in a back office of Bill's home remodeling business.

Since we each had a # of contacts in the community we thought it might good to invite some other men to come & join us.

It ended up being an interesting group. I invited Sid Shonberg, a Jewish business owner, who was a good friend. (Sid gave me this beautiful painting that hangs in my office.)

Our group included those who were at all levels of Christian faith, & 2 or 3 like Sid, who were not believers ... but who were curious.

There was one fellow named Larry, who owned a shoe store. Larry & I had become good friends, so I asked him to join us. Larry brought life to our discussions; he brought questions that sparked lots of interaction among the guys.

We'd spend about 20 minutes eating a sack lunch, then I led a 20-minute Bible Study, & then we closed with a prayer. I was taking the men through the Gospel of John. (I loved John even then!) And one Wednesday we came to this passage that we're looking at today.

So, Good News from Jesus, as recorded by John, to you who have gathered here this morning for worship. Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

**(VIDEO begin at 2:00:03 ... end at 2:00:54)**

"Do not be worried and upset," Jesus told them. "Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. You know the way that leads to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?"

Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me."

(John 14:1-6)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

So, as we looked at this passage, I asked the guys ...  
"What is Jesus saying here?" ...

"Well, 1<sup>st</sup> of all He's telling us that there's nothing we should be anxious or uptight about."

And then, since we were in a home remodeling office one man commented on Jesus "building" a place for us to live in Heaven.

Then we came to Jesus' final assertion in this passage ... "I am the way, the truth, & the life; no one goes to the Father except by me." That caused quite a stir among the guys ... especially Larry. He protested. He objected. And our 20 minutes was up.

So, I gave them an assignment. I told them to read over this passage several times, & then next week we'd discuss their objections.

This morning I want to invite you into that small group. I want you to think about this passage, especially John 14:6, (X) & I want you to tell me what your biggest problem is with Jesus' statement. I suspect you've heard other people voice their objections to this "one way" claim. And I'm going to come down in a moment with a microphone & ask what issues you might have with it.

Now since that time back in 1975, I've come to the conclusion that this is really the most **controversial** verse in the Bible. It causes more **distress** with people than any other Scriptural statement.

In fact, the day after our Wednesday Bible Study/lunch, Larry called me. He said, "Rande, I grew up going to Church, & I've never heard anything about Jesus being the only way. So, I called my Pastor, & I scheduled a meeting with him ... & I want you to come with me!"

So, the following Saturday morning off we went. When we got there Larry opened his Bible & read ...  
 "Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, & the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.'"  
 And then Larry looked at his Pastor pointblank & asked ...  
 "How do you explain this statement?"

Here's how Larry's Pastor responded. "If we wanted to study physics, there are 2 ways to go about it. We could enroll in a class here at I.U.P. & be taught by a professor who has great knowledge concerning physics.

Or we could walk over to the library & get all the books on physics that we can carry & start teaching ourselves.

Both ways will give us an understanding of physics, but there's really only one "best" way, & that's to study under a professor who has greater knowledge than us, & have him 'tutor' us. In the same way, that's what Jesus was saying. 'I'm the best teacher to tell you about God. I'm the easiest way for you to get to know Him.'

Larry's Pastor went on, "Now all ways will lead to God eventually, but if we want to get on the best road, go to Jesus." He said that this passage needs to be interpreted like that. "No one else can get us to the Father quicker or easier than Jesus can."

As we left the office, Larry was smiling. He said,  
 "I want to go 1<sup>st</sup> next Wednesday;  
 I want to be the 1<sup>st</sup> to raise my concern."

Now, what about you? ... I'd like to get the discussion going. Let's be honest now. When you hear Jesus say ...  
 "No one goes to the Father except by me" ...  
 what's your biggest concern about that? ...

- *How can God be so narrow minded to only allow one way to Him?*
- *What about all the other religions that believe in God?*
- *What about those people who've never heard of Jesus?*

- *What about those people who've lived really moral lives, but aren't Christians?*
- *What about newborn children who may die?*

What I want to do in the next few moments is respond to as many of these objections as I can.

So, hang in here with me, some of this might get a little heady, but put your thinking caps on, & I want us to have an intellectual discussion about Jesus' claim to be the only way to God.

This is an eternally important subject.

Here's what I did with my 9 or 10 guys the following Wednesday. I had them finish this sentence ...

"Jesus isn't really the only way to God because ...."

Larry, of course, had his hand up. He said,

"Jesus isn't really the only way to God because ... the Bible doesn't actually teach that. That's what my Pastor says. He says that Jesus is the best way, but ... there are other ways."

So, I said, "let's look at some passages & see what Scripture does teach, & then decide once & for all if the Bible really claims that Jesus is the only way to God."

(X) "The testimony is that God has given us eternal life, & this life has its source in his Son. Whoever has the Son has this life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I am writing this to you so that you may know that you have eternal life - you that believe in the Son of God."

(1 John 5:11-13)

(X) "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not have life, but will remain under God's punishment." (John 3:36)

(X) Jesus said, "That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you will die in your sins if you do not believe that 'I Am Who I Am.'" (John 8:24)

(X) "Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us." (The Acts 4:12)

After reading these verses the guys pretty much agreed ... "Well, yea, it seems that the Bible does teach that Jesus is the only way. There's really no disputing that. The statements are pretty clear."

Then someone else completed the sentence. "Jesus isn't really the only way to God because if He was ... most people would end up in the wrong place."

Now here's the reasoning behind that idea.

Let's say that about 75% of the world's population is not Scripturally Christian. How could so many people all be wrong? ... Way too many individuals don't believe in Scriptural Christianity, so it cannot be the only way ... otherwise most people would be going to Hell.

So, as the guys discussed this, we discovered that there's a false assumption behind this objection ... that is, popular opinion defines truth. But, this isn't always the case. For centuries popular opinion believed that the earth was flat. Today we know that the earth is spherical. But for 100's & 100's of years popular opinion dictated that which was not true.

The majority **does not** direct what is true, spiritually speaking. Jesus even addressed this idea of the majority & minority. He said that not only is it possible ... it's probable. (X) "Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate to hell is wide & the road that leads to it is easy, & there are many who travel it. But the gate to life is narrow & the way that leads to it is hard, & there are few people who find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)

Jesus is teaching that the majority does not dictate what is true. He's warning that most people are on the broad road to destruction ... to Hell.

Then somebody else raised an objection.

Here's how he finished that sentence ...

"Jesus isn't really the only way to God because ... it's unfair to those who sincerely follow other religions."

Really nice people with good intentions do not believe in Jesus Christ. This point argues that sincere people ought to be accepted by God on the basis of their strong convictions ... therefore Christianity can't be only way.

But do you see the false assumption in this reasoning? ... The supposition here is that intensity of belief, that sincerity brings truth.

But, of course, this too, isn't always the case.

Some years ago, (X) Jim Marshall of the Minnesota Vikings picked up a fumble & fought off tacklers repeatedly until he crossed the goal line. Marshall, however, crossed the other team's goal ... & he scored for the 49'ers! Marshall was sincere in his efforts, but he was sincerely wrong. And it's possible to be intensely earnest in a religious belief ... & to be totally mistaken.

That's why Jesus cautioned us not to be deceived. (Matthew 24:4) We need to find out what is really true & what is right ... & not go simply by what "feels" right.

He warned that, for some people, (X) there's going to be a rude awakening one day. (Matthew 7:21)

A person can be completely sincere in thinking that he/she doesn't need Jesus Christ ... but Scripture teaches that that person is sadly mistaken.

Sincerity **does not** dictate truth.

And then there was another objection. "Jesus isn't really the only way to God because ... anything that narrow & exclusive cannot be right or acceptable."

Boy, that's today's thinking isn't it? ... If we're too rigid, too exclusive, then we're a bigot ... & that's wrong.

In other words, Christianity's claims are too limited or narrow-minded ... therefore they can't be right.

Listen to a recent letter to the editor in Time magazine. It's in response to one of their frequent stories about Jesus ...

"I find it disheartening that a religion such as Christianity believes it has a divine right to convert all peoples to its ways. A society's religion helps it adapt to the stresses of its environment. Once culture is changed by outsiders, it begins to deteriorate."

(Paul S. Sledzik ... Narragansett, RI)

Listen ... the fact that  $1 + 1$  always = 2 is very, very rigid. But it's also always right.

The truth is often very **narrow-minded**. If I want to call Bill Mackie on the telephone, I have to dial his "exclusive" # ... xxx-xxx-xxxx. I have to be "rigid" in that. "Almost" isn't close enough. If the # I dial is off by just one digit, I'll reach the wrong person.

Does that mean the phone company is narrow-minded? ...

Landing an airplane on a narrow runway requires some restricted specifications. When I fly on a plane, I prefer to have a precise pilot, with a very narrow-minded point of view. I don't want a broadminded pilot.

In fact, I'd prefer that he was a fanatic on the subject.

Jesus is like a narrow-minded pilot.

He's trying to tell all of us that it's not safe to land haphazardly. He's not limiting our options;

He's protecting us from a fatal crash.

It's interesting how so many people think the Lord is less particular about saving our soul than He is about temperature & gravity & other laws of nature.

Water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit,  
& water boils precisely at 212 degrees Fahrenheit.

And the law of gravity decrees that objects heavier than the air are attracted to the center of the earth at a speed of 32 feet per second.

If God isn't haphazard with nature, He certainly isn't lackadaisical in the matter of our soul & the way to get to Heaven. He planned this out before the world was created, how you & I could spend eternity with Him.

(Ephesians 1:4)

And, in so doing, He's also **specifically** planned the way for us to get to Heaven. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Jesus said, "I am the gate," & anyone who "climbs in some other way, is a thief & a robber." (John 10:7,1) Yet many people think that's too demanding or restricting. And even if they think it is ... it's the way God planned it.

And I need to tell you ... it's the only way.

Now there was a final issue that those guys raised, & it's probably the most difficult one of all.

"Jesus isn't really the only way to God because ...  
that's totally unreasonable to those  
who've never heard of Jesus."

This is one of the most troublesome issues to address. The truth is, no one ultimately knows what will happen to those who've never heard about Jesus.

But, we can understand a few things.

There are several truths that Scripture provides us.

We know that God is **righteous** & **just** in all He does.

(Deuteronomy 32:4) There's never going to be anyone in Hell shaking his/her fist at God & saying ...

"it's unfair that I'm here. God, you treated me unjustly."

No, God is going to be righteous in all His judgments.

He's always going to do the **right thing**.

There's never going to be any question about God's justice. (Hebrews 6:10)

People are not condemned for **rejecting** a message they've never heard. (Romans 2:15) That's not the problem. Lack of **knowledge** is not the issue, & it isn't the reason why people end up in **Hell**. The issue is **sin**.

What are we going to do with the sin problem? ...

And Scripture teaches us that people are responsible for the understanding they have received ... & at a minimum, everyone has some knowledge of God gained through nature & conscious. (Romans 1:19)

Scripture is perfectly clear about that.

We're given a conscience, in which we are held responsible. (Our behavior ...  
doing what we know in our heart is right.)

And we also know that no one will ever be in Heaven because they've been totally sincere or lived a completely good life ... for no one has. (Romans 3:23)

The only reason people will be in Heaven is because of God's grace personally received. (Ephesians 2:8-9) And the only basis for forgiveness, clearly outlined in Scripture, is Jesus Christ, paying the price for each person's sin, by His death upon the cross. (1 Peter 2:24)

So, we wrestled with these questions that afternoon ... actually it took several weeks. We tried to come to some conclusions. And not everybody agreed.

But it did get us to thinking, especially my friend Larry.

He bought a study Bible, & he read it. He was intensively on a search. And he came back to the group week after week after week. And we continued to address this issue about Jesus being "the only way."

And eventually we concluded that the bottom line of this whole issue of Jesus being "the only way" is this ...

Jesus taught that all of us have a sin problem. (Romans 3:12)

And this sin problem is keeping all of us apart from God.

(Isaiah 59:2)

Scripture teaches that Jesus is the only one who can solve this sin problem. That's why He died on the cross.

Now, Jesus is either lying about this ... or He's a fool & didn't know any better, He was just mixed up ...  
or He's telling the truth.

Those are the only 3 options we have.

So, which is it? ... There really aren't any other possibilities. He's either speaking the truth, or He's spreading something false. He's either true for all, or He's true for none. So, Larry, which is it? ...  
So C.C.R.M., which is it? ...

Or look at it this way, if there are really other ways to God, Jesus Christ's **death** on the **cross** was in **vain**. It was totally **unnecessary** ... because since there are other ways to God ... He didn't need to die. It was a waste.

But Scripture clearly states that the reason Jesus died on the cross is because there was no other way. He died because there was no other way for us to make payment for the sins that separate us from our God.

(John 19:30)

Scripture claims that Jesus Christ died on the cross & rose again for you & for me because there's nothing we can do to earn our salvation. (Isaiah 64:6) Jesus was, & is, the only hope of the world. Sin must be dealt with, & Christ was the only way God bridged that sin gap ...  
& He did it because He loved us. (John 3:16)

(X) "God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us & sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven." (1 John 4:9-10)

Jesus stands before you & me this morning, & He boldly proclaims ... "I am the way, (not just a way),  
(X) I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life; no one goes to the Father except by me."

About 6 months later my friend Larry said to me, "I've been reading my Bible, & studying the claims of Christ. I've been wrestling with all these issues, & I'm now totally convinced. I can't do anything but accept Jesus into my life ... will you pray with me?"

We got down on our knees in the back of his shoe store, & we prayed. "Jesus, I'm a sinner, & in need of a Savior. I ask for your forgiveness. I know that there's no one else who can pay for my sins except you. Please come into my life. I want you to be my Lord & Savior."

To be honest, that's exactly the kind of prayer that everyone of us needs to pray.

"Jesus, I'm a sinner, & in need of a Savior. I ask for your forgiveness. I want you to be the Lord of my life."

Listen ... it's not mean or bigoted or narrow-minded to say that Jesus is the only way ... if it's the truth.

Actually, it's mean & bigoted & narrow-minded not to tell people that Jesus is the only way ... & the only truth ... & the only life!

I appreciate what evangelical theologian, Albert Mohler (X) has written ... "If all we need is a teacher of enlightenment, the Buddha will do. If all we need is a collection of gods for every occasion, Hinduism will do. If all we need is a tribal deity, then any deity will do. If all we need is a lawgiver, Moses will do. If all we need is a set of rules & a way of devotion, Muhammad or Joseph Smith will do. If all we need is inspiration & insight into the sovereign self, Oprah will do. But if we need a Savior, only Jesus will do."

The reality is, Jesus, the I AM, answers 3 key questions that everyone has ...

- How can I be saved? ... He is the way!
- How can I be sure? ... He is the truth!
- How can I be satisfied? ... He is the life!

Do you believe this? ... But, before you answer too quickly, understand that you will be called intolerant, narrow-minded, bigoted, arrogant, & even hateful.

You will be offensive to a pluralistic, all-roads-lead-to-heaven culture.

May God bless you as you boldly acknowledge Him.

(John 15:18-21)

**MARANA THA**