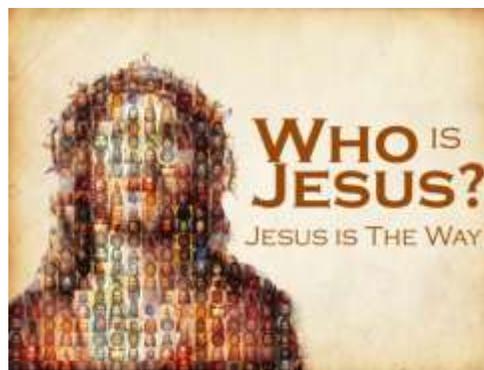


Read John 14:1-6

“I am *the* way.” More people in their search for answers to questions of faith stumble over this statement of Jesus than any other. And probably at no other point in time has Jesus statement that he is the way, the truth and the life been viewed more negatively than it is today.



But why you may ask? Why do so many people have a hard time with Jesus claim that he is the only way to heaven? The answer is very simple. We live in a world that highly values tolerance above all else. And when you add to that high value on tolerance the idea which many people hold today that there is no simple black and white issues but lots of gray; that there are really no absolutes in life anymore; then you understand why people stumble over Jesus claim.

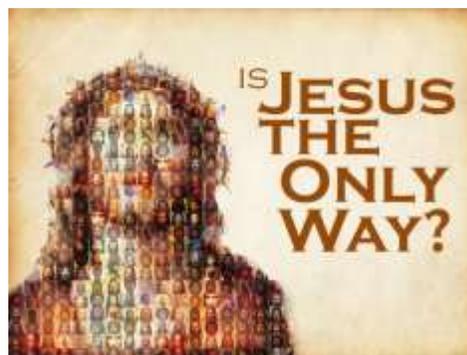
The high value placed on tolerance also hinders many disciples of Jesus from sharing their faith with others because who wants to be seen as telling someone else what to do or believe. Why if you and I were to insist that Jesus is the only way to heaven; then other people may think that we are arrogant and no one wants to be perceived as intolerant and bigoted.

But still, Jesus said it! And he said other things that are as equally absolute. But how are we to deal with these absolute statements that Jesus makes throughout scripture? After all, I've said it for the last two weeks; **who you believe Jesus is impacts your relationship with him. And who you believe Jesus is will impact your relationships with other people also.**

So today we are going to wrestle with understanding the identity of Jesus as the way. And in any discussion of this statement of Jesus I think there are two questions that we bring to this scripture and our struggle with the identity of Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

So here is the first question: Is this really true that Jesus is the only way; the only way to the Father, to heaven, to eternity.

Now people far more intelligent take years writing books to explain these questions to people; but I'm going to try my best to give you something that I believe will help you to not only have an answer but a way for you to be able to respond to others when these questions arise. And most importantly I want you to understand that these questions require



more than the time we have this morning so I hope it inspires you to think and discuss and pray about what we share this morning.

I want to start by looking at the question that Thomas asked Jesus in John 14:5. Thomas didn't understand why or where Jesus could possibly be going that the disciples were not going along also. So Thomas asked the question that I think every generation asks: 'We don't know the way?'

Thomas asked the searching question: What's the way to go? When you think about it that question is the one that everyone asks. Everyone is searching for a way through life. Everyone is searching for a path that leads to something that provides meaning and purpose to life.

As a result of the search people head down various paths all in hopes of finding what they are looking for. What Jesus said; and what I believe is; that *while people will search down many pathways in life; there is only one path that ultimately leads to God.* And that path is through Jesus- the way, the truth and the life.

So when Jesus says to Thomas, I am the way, he is really telling Thomas just stick close to me and you'll see the way forward. Walk the way I walk and live according to my life and you'll know the way.

Jesus statement that he is the way is a radical statement. Jesus is in essence telling Thomas, telling us, that as human beings we can never get there on our own. There is only one way to the Father and the way that we get there is not by anything that we do or deserve. Do you know what we call that? That is grace!

Grace is God giving a gift to humanity that we don't deserve, that we cannot earn; it is a gift not of our merit but of God's unconditional love for us.

Listen to how Paul expressed this to the disciples in Ephesians 2:4-9.

That passage is so radical to our way of thinking today. We think the world operates on the principle that if you do good, work hard and are generally a good person; then you should get something good.

The problem with that way of thinking is that we've taken that approach to life and made it applicable to things of faith. That God accepts us if we are generally good, work hard and don't hurt other people. But Jesus comes along and shatters that way of thinking by saying, I am the way; it is not about your works or how good you are; it is by grace through faith in Jesus.

You are probably wondering why this ladder is here. Well let's think about this ladder as a goodness scale. At the top of the ladder is God. God is good- as good as it gets! Down at the bottom of the ladder are all the mass-murderers and evil people of history.

Now think about where you fit on that ladder. But before you do, let's put someone like Mother Theresa on the ladder. She's not quite at the top but we certainly know she's not at the bottom. And, while we are at it how about Billy Graham, where does he belong? Ok, indulge me for one more- where would I go?

Now that we have some reference points on the good scale; where are you going to fit in; after all you're a good person?

You see what Billy Graham and Mother Theresa and I know is that no matter how good we are; we are never going to be good enough. That is where grace comes in.

People want to believe that *their good works* will get them to heaven. People want to believe that *the faith they practice* will get them to heaven. People want to believe that there are *multiple paths* that will get them to heaven. But that is not what the Bible teaches. That is not what Jesus says. And it is not about paths *to* God because the paths we make to God are just that-*our* paths we've attempted to make to God.

I heard someone put it this way recently; *there is no path that we can make that gets to God*. There is no path that gets to God because it is about God making a path to us in the person of Jesus and offering us grace. It's not the path that *we* take that matters; what matters is the path *God* takes to offer us grace and *our* response to that grace.

You see who you believe Jesus is impacts the way you relate to him. And if you believe Jesus is the way; then the impact on your life is responding to that grace by believing that Jesus is your only way to heaven.

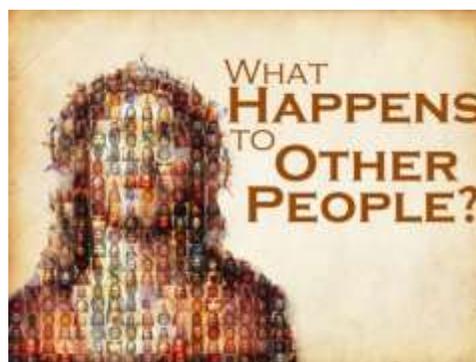
So we are clear, Jesus is the way; the only way! And by accepting God's grace and choosing to daily follow Jesus we find our way to God.

Now let's apply that to the **second question**: *What happens to people of other religions or people who never hear about Jesus? What is their end?*

Again, before I go on let me say this: there is a whole lot we can discuss here but a limited amount of time so hold onto your questions and just follow me for a few moments.

Let me answer this second question in two ways.

First, it is not my place-nor yours- to determine someone's eternal destiny. That



belongs to God and I'm glad I don't have to determine the answer to that question. Far be it from me to limit the grace of God and how God acts in people's lives.

Let me tell you a very personal story about this issue. It was shortly after I began serving my first church that I had the opportunity to sit with a family at the bedside of their family member as they died. The individual who passed away was a good person. This person didn't attend church, although the rest of the family did. This person and I had many conversations as they walked the path to death. The one thing I could never get this individual to do was make a public profession of faith in Jesus as their savior.

After this person died and the family and I were on the way out of the hospital I was struggling to know what would be the end of this person. After all, I wanted to comfort the family and say I'm certain your loved one is in heaven; but I wasn't certain because he didn't say the sinner prayer and go through the steps that I thought he had to take.

Well as I was on the way out an older pastor came walking into the hospital; and I think he knew that something was bothering me. I unburdened myself for a while and then I'll never forget what he told me. He looked me in the eye and said, 'George, we're not God and it's not our decision to make.'

That simple statement has played over and over again in my mind for the last 25 years. And I'll tell you this; you and I are both glad to know that I'm not God!

So what happens to other people- people of other faiths and people who never hear the name of Jesus? I'll leave that to God to determine since it is by grace that we are saved. That is the first way I want to answer this question.

The **second way I want to answer that question** is to say that while it is God's grace that determines a person's eternal destiny; you and I are not off the hook when it comes to demonstrating that we have found the way. You see, there may be people in remote villages in the Amazon that never meet a missionary- and how God works things out for them is up to God. *But you and I meet people every day who not only get to meet a missionary they also get to hear about Jesus by observing your life and how you follow Jesus!*

You see, we often ask the wrong question. We're worried about the destiny of people that we will never connect with while people that we relate with on a daily basis are right in front of us- our family, friends, co-workers and neighbors.

They are asking us Thomas' question every day- which way should I go? Where do I find meaning and purpose for my life? How do I find my way to God?

Remember Jesus response to Thomas; Jesus was telling Thomas to stick close; to watch his life, believe and follow his example to experience the fullness of life. Well that is our call as disciples of Jesus today. We are called to follow Jesus and provide the example to others about how to find the joy of life- to find the meaning and purpose of life- and to show them how to respond to the pathway that Jesus has opened up to them.

Here is the challenge. I think we live in fear of offending others; but honestly we should never be afraid to say that there is a way that leads to life. We don't have to do it arrogantly or judgmentally or offensively; but we can certainly be invitational, loving and humble. We can demonstrate a changed life; a life changed by grace that God has poured into our lives. A life lived as one who has responded to God's grace and chosen the way that leads to life- life now and forever.

