

I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 14:1-6

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. **2** In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? **3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. **4** And you know the way to where I am going.” **5** Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” **6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

We consider this bold claim from Jesus in four steps:

I. **The concept of the claim.**

“A narrow escape” is the concept Jesus is presenting in this claim for his identity and purpose. We Americans love the idea of an “escape” (“Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid” cliff scene, “Dunkirk,” “Argo,” etc.), but we are not enthusiastic about that word “narrow.” We like to keep our options open and to think of ourselves as the heroes in getting out of tough situations. Jesus is claiming that we CANNOT get ourselves out of our sin, whether by philosophy, religion, education, or any other kind of self-effort. We must be rescued (note the passive voice of that verb).

II. **The context of the claim (14:1-6).**

In his classic commentary for the New International Commentary series, Leon Morris sums up the message of these six verses in 3 sentences, which we can illustrate through 3 songs.

- A. “They [the apostles] need not be troubled in heart” (“Lean on Me” by Bill Withers) [14:1]. Jesus says, “You believe in God [indicative]. Believe also in me” [imperative].
- B. “He is preparing a place in heaven for them” (“There’s a Place for Us” from West Side Story, music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim) [14:2-3].
- C. “And he is the means of bringing them to the Father” (“I’ll Take You There” by the Staples Singers) [14:4-6].

III. **The content of the claim (14:6).**

There are 4 parts to the actual “I am” statement of Jesus. He claims in them to be the answer to human longings at the core of the human soul. The 4 parts correspond to 4 subjects of philosophy, the human quest for wisdom.

A. The Way (Ethics in philosophy identifying “the good”).

Among the world’s religions, Christianity is unique in its emphasis on grace, undeserved favor from a holy God, who loves his creation even when its creatures rebel against him. In our universal human yearning for heaven, other religions say live ethically in order to be saved. Christianity says, be saved in order to live ethically. The Christian ethic taught by Jesus in response to his gift of salvation stands out in human history and still today. An illustration of that amazing ethic arises from the famous American feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys at the end of the nineteenth century. At a recent meeting of the Tennessee Judicial Conference and the Tennessee Bar Association in Kingsport, TN, descendants of the Hatfield and McCoy clans taught a seminar on “Mediation.” During the Q&A session following the presentation, someone asked the presenters what finally stopped the feud. Both the great grandson of the Hatfield patriarch and the great-nephew of the McCoy patriarch dated the end from the moment the Hatfield patriarch became a Christian at the age of 71. He responded to the invitation of an itinerant evangelist and was

baptized. He held that 1 Peter 2:21-25 prevented him from holding hate and resentment in his heart. Receiving mercy enabled him to show mercy and unilaterally to stop the violence. That way is a great way to go!

B. The Truth (Metaphysics in philosophy identifying “the true”).

In his 1987 best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Professor Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago began with this sentence, “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes that truth is relative.” The irony that Bloom employs has been used by many others before and since to show that modern and postmodern claims that there is no absolute truth are themselves making claims of absolute truth. Jesus claims that he himself is THE truth, that which corresponds to ultimate reality, things as they really are.

C. . The Life (Aesthetics in philosophy identifying “the beautiful”).

Whereas many in our culture and in other world cultures tout lifestyles of the rich and famous as the way to enjoy beauty and LIFE, Christ promotes a life in himself that may be hard. Ultimate happiness will come in the restoration of all things at the end of history, and penultimate happiness comes through a life of meaning and sacrifice now for the sake of a higher cause than the self. Christ came that human beings might have life and have it ABUNDANTLY (John 10:10).

D. The Only (Epistemology in philosophy identifying the exclusivity of Jesus).

Jesus’ claim in 14:6 sounds bigoted, narrow, and arrogant to John Hick, author of *The Myth of God Incarnate*. He counter-claims without clear evidence that Jesus never said what John attributes to him, but rather the early church insinuated its own beliefs into that Gospel account. According to Hick, *The Bhagavid Gita of Hinduism* is far superior to the claim of Jesus when it asserts: “Howsoever man may approach me, even so do I accept them; for, on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine.” About this approach to world religions, Tim Keller writes in *The Reason for God*: “It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one way to think about all religions (namely that they are all equal) is right.”

IV. **Our contact with the claim**

In order that we may be doers of Jesus’ word and not hearers only, we must make personal contact with Jesus’ words. Visiting 2 places will help us make that contact.

A. A garden, specifically the Garden of Gethsemane. The same night, in which Jesus makes this claim, he asks for Peter, James, and John to watch and pray with him in his time of agony (“for it won’t be long, ‘til I’m gonna need somebody to lean on”). Perhaps the greatest proof for the truth of Jesus’ exclusive claim in John 14:6 is that the Father did not let the cup pass from Jesus when Jesus prayed, “If there is any other way, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39, 42,44). Surely if there had been another way for God to be both just and justifier of humanity, he would have taken it (see Romans 3:26)!

B. A cliff, specifically that same cliff Butch and Sundance were on in the introduction to this sermon. To all who want to say that they are not sure about whether or not Jesus’ claim is right and therefore they will not decide, I answer with Blaise Pascal that you must decide. We are all literally wagering our lives on how we respond to Jesus’ claim. I urge you not to try to stay on that cliff, but to jump, trusting Jesus to be for you the way, the truth, and the life.

Discussion Questions

1. (Ice-breaker) What is your favorite picture of a narrow escape, whether in film, in history, or in your own life experience?

2. (14:1-6) Do you think Leon Morris's three-sentence summary of the meaning of these verses is accurate, and do you think the 3 songs David suggested accurately illustrate that meaning?

3. (14:6a) What are 3 parts of Jesus' ethic (e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount) that you think are particularly impressive? Are there parts of his ethic that you think are problematic?

4. (14:6b) What is one thing Jesus taught as truth that you have heard your family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues say is false? How would you answer them?

5. (14:6c) What are you most tempted to believe would give you a truly beautiful life in place of Jesus? How do you answer yourself when you begin to "go there"?

6. (14:6d) How do you test the truthfulness of Jesus' statement that "no one comes to the Father except through me"? Does that sentence on Jesus' lips sound bigoted, narrow, and arrogant to you? Why or why not?

7. (Overall) How does this claim of Jesus in 14:6 make contact with your life today, and what do you believe you are supposed to do about it?