

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

SERIES: I AM: GETTING TO KNOW
JESUS



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John 14:1-6
Sixth Message
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John 14:1-6

I want you to think about the last time that you were lost. I mean, really lost. For me, this happened about five years ago. I was in Delaware visiting family, and I wanted to find someplace interesting to go running. I should have realized that “someplace interesting in Delaware” was an oxymoron, but I thought I would give it a try.

I found a state park 25 minutes away, so I borrowed a car from my sister-in-law and headed out. Unfortunately, my phone died at the end of the run, and I had no charger. Being a millennial, I had no idea how to get back to my sister-in-law’s house without my phone, and I thought I should have paid more attention on the way here! Then I realized there was a visitor center at the park, so I had some hope. In the visitor center, I picked up something that I had heard about before but never actually seen myself—a paper road map! Relieved, I traced a route on the map back to where I thought the house was, got in the car, and hoped for the best.

The drive was going well until I got into a small Delaware town and knew I needed to take a left somewhere. I started to consult the paper map, but the sun was just above the horizon and was blinding me. I find some sunglasses in the car and put them on while trying to catch the name of a cross street. But before I know it, I see lights flashing in the rearview mirror. As I pull over, I start to feel a bit sheepish when I remember that the license plate on my sister-in-law’s little black Kia Forte reads “LUI VTN.” Yes, as in the fashion designer. But what can do you?!

In my rearview mirror, I see an officer get out of her squad car. When she gets to my window, she asks me, “Do you know why I pulled you over?” No, but I didn’t think I was speeding. “I pulled you over for reading that map.” Are you serious? I thought. Isn’t that what maps are for?! It’s not even my phone. It’s a paper map! As if she could read my mind, she says, “You should never read a paper map while driving. It’s way more dangerous than looking at your phone!” At this point, I can’t think of anything helpful to say, but I am just hoping that she lets me off with a warning. She walks back to her car, does

her thing, then walks back up to my window and says, “I am giving you a ticket for distracted driving.”

As the officer is walking back to her car, I glance in the rearview mirror and catch a glimpse of myself. As I do, my whole encounter with this police officer immediately made sense. In that rearview mirror, I saw a reflection of my sister-in-law’s diamond-studded aviator sunglasses I had been wearing this whole time. So this officer pulls over a 28-year-old man with a Louis Vuitton license plate, diamond-studded aviators, and a California license driving through small-town Delaware—I was doomed from the start!

That was the last time I was really lost. How about you? When was the last time you were lost? Maybe some of you are thinking of a time when you were physically lost—on the roads, trying to get somewhere, not knowing where you were.

But for others of us, our sense of being lost might be a bit deeper, more existential. That feeling of being lost in life. Where is my life headed? What am I doing with my life? What’s my purpose? All the time I spend at my job, doing my school work, running errands, taking care of the kids, pursuing my hobbies, taking vacations—where is all of this taking me?

Maybe it is that existential feeling of being lost that brought you here to church today. You have some sense, or at least some degree of hope, that church might be the place to help you find your way.

For others of us, we’ve been coming to church our whole lives. We have been walking with Jesus and pursuing God for years, and yet—maybe for the first time, or maybe after years and years of this—we are asking ourselves, What’s the point? Where is this whole faith thing taking me? How do I take the next step forward in my relationship with God? We all feel a bit lost sometimes.

There are two ways in which we can be lost. We can be lost because we don’t know our destination, or we can be lost because we don’t know the directions. We can be

lost because we don't know where it is that we want to go. Or we can be lost because we don't know how to get to where we want to be.

Today, we are going to look at a passage of Scripture in which Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." This is a statement that Jesus makes for those of us who are feeling lost. Together, we will see that, in this statement, Jesus is giving us both a destination and the directions for how to get there. He is giving us a vision for life that helps us understand where we are trying to go and how we can get there.

Understanding our destination

As with several of the other "I am" statements we have looked at over the past few weeks, Jesus makes this claim in the middle of a conversation. In this case, Jesus is in the Upper Room with his disciples on the night he will be betrayed. He has told the disciples that he will be leaving them. While the disciples don't understand what he means, Jesus knows that he is talking about his crucifixion and resurrection (just days away) and, ultimately, his ascension into heaven.

John 14:1-3: [Jesus says]

"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."

Jesus begins here by trying to reassure his disciples. They know that he is about to leave, and they are worried. What are they going to do without him? They are worried about feeling lost. Jesus speaks into that worry and says, Trust me. I know what I am doing.

Then Jesus goes on to explain what it is that he is doing—why he has to leave them. What does he say? "In my Father's house are many rooms." When Jesus says "my Father's house," he refers to heaven. This is the place where Jesus is going. In heaven, Jesus says, there are many rooms, literally "dwellings." There is plenty of room in heaven for all of us, Jesus says!

In the words of Audio Adrenaline, "It's a big, big house, with lots and lot of room. A big, big table, with lots and lots of food. A big, big yard, where we can play football. A big, big house. It's my father's house."¹

Is that how you picture heaven? A big house? Lots of food? A huge yard with grass—not turf, but natural grass! What a luxury!

Think about that for a moment, though. What comes to mind when you think of heaven? What do you think it is going to be like? This is an important question for us to ask because, as we will see in a moment, this will be the destination to which Jesus is directing us. This is where Jesus wants us to set our sights. But if this destination is going to be compelling—if it's going to draw us in—you have to ask yourself, what do you expect heaven to be like?

Or let me ask the question a little differently: What is your idea of salvation? What does it mean to be saved? I ask it this way because not everyone believes in heaven, but everyone believes in salvation of some kind. There is some solution, some ultimate good outcome that we are seeking.

John Hick was one of the most influential secular philosophers of religion in the last century. He grew up as a Christian but became a pluralist as a young adult. John Hick studied all of the major world religions, seeing what they had in common and where they differed. Through his study, he became convinced that all religions were culturally conditioned responses to the same ultimate reality. There is one ultimate reality, one thing that is true in an absolute sense, and all of the different world religions are just different, equally valid ways of getting at the ultimate reality. This pluralistic worldview has trickled down so that now it is the dominant way that people in our culture think of the world. Maybe that's the way you think of the world as well.²

Given his understanding of reality, this is John Hick's definition of salvation: the transformation from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. What John Hick noticed as he studied the various world religions is that every world religion is trying to take people from a place of being self-centered (where they are at the center of their universe and their world revolves around them) to a place of being reality-centered—that is, giving your life wholly and completely to whatever you understand this ultimate reality to be.³

For a Christian, salvation is giving your life fully to God and trusting Jesus to forgive your sins. For a Hindu, salvation is living a good life and treating other people well so that you can eventually escape the cycle of reincarnation. For the secularist or the atheist, salvation might just be maximizing joy and minimizing

suffering, both in your life and in the lives of others—making the world a better place, maybe through the use of technology, maybe through the destruction of technology, or in whatever way seems best to you.

In the eyes of John Hick (and perhaps for you as well), the most important thing a person can do—the destination that we are after—is get to a place where we are less focused on ourselves and more focused on whatever we believe to be most important in life.

Jesus wants to redirect us to a different destination. He wants us to be headed for heaven.

Let me ask you again: what do you expect heaven to be like? What is so great about this place that makes it worth pursuing?

When we think of heaven, many of us, I fear, think of many things that are true about heaven but are not the most important things about heaven. We think about the streets of gold, and we are excited about the extravagance and abundance. And heaven will be a place of extravagance and abundance. Or we hear that heaven will be a place with no tears or sadness or death, and we long to experience that kind of joy and peace and security. And heaven will definitely be a place of joy and peace and security unlike we have ever known. Or, here in John 14, we hear Jesus talk about his father's house with many rooms, and we think about our studio apartments and postage-stamp lots with accessory dwelling units (ADUs) pushing the city codes to their very limits. We long for more space—for some room to breathe and grow a garden. And heaven will be a place with plenty of space and beautiful, fresh air and things growing everywhere. But none of those things is what heaven is really about. None of those things is what makes heaven worth pursuing.

In John 14, Jesus is not trying to get us excited about an awesome mansion that we get to live in forever. No! Jesus wants us to get excited about heaven because he will be there. And if we listen to him carefully, this is precisely what he says. Look again at verse 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.

Come again and take you where? To heaven? To your big mansion? No. To myself. Why? That where I am you may also be.

That is what we are after. Life with Jesus. Eternity with Jesus. To spend every moment in his presence. Enjoying his friendship. Praising him for his glory and his beauty, and his power. Being amazed by his majesty. Being surrounded by his love. Being covered by his grace. Just being with him.

This is what heaven is about. This is our destination—where our lives ought to be headed. Heaven, yes. But heaven so that we can be with Jesus. Jesus is inviting us into an eternal relationship with him.

Figuring out the directions

After Jesus paints this picture of eternity, he makes a somewhat obscure statement in verse 4. He says to his disciples:

John 14:4-5:

**“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?”**

Here, Jesus is transitioning from talking about our destination to the directions we must follow to get to that destination. But Thomas says, Jesus, I don't think I really understand the destination all that well. How can I possibly know how to get here?

So Jesus responds with one of the most beautiful—and yet, to many people, one of the most off-putting—statements in the New Testament:

John 14:6:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

When many people hear this statement of Jesus, they focus on the second part: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” What they hear in this statement is Jesus saying something like this: There is this really amazing place called heaven. You would love it there! It's going to be awesome. Here's the thing: if you want to get there, you will have to go through me. And if you try to sneak in another way—through Islam or New Ageism or anything else—I'm going to send you to hell. So, good luck!

That is so far from what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is not saying that there is some really awesome thing out there that he is keeping us from. No. He is saying, God is the really awesome thing. And I am God. So if you want to get to him, you have to come to me.

Jesus isn't trying to keep us out of a really awesome place. He is trying to help us see that he is the really awesome thing. Whatever else we might be seeking after will not deliver on its promises.

In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis says that "the gates of hell are locked from the inside."⁴ This is what Jesus is saying here. If you want to experience salvation, it's found in being with me. If you look for it elsewhere, what you will find is actually hell.

Jesus is not trying to keep us out of heaven. He is trying to correct our vision of what heaven is. He is inviting us in—into relationship with him. Jesus really is the destination that we are all after. And he is also the path to get there. Jesus is the way to heaven because heaven is actually all about him. This is what Jesus means when he says that he is the way, the truth, and the life.

In the northwest corner of Arizona, about two hours west of Las Vegas on I-15, there is a place called the Virgin River Gorge. It is a deep cleft that has been cut through the rock by the Virgin River. As you are driving through the desert from Las Vegas, there is a cliff off to the right that leads up to a plateau. As you are approaching it on I-15, it looks like the highway will run right into this cliff. As you get closer, in the last miles or so before you get to the cliff, you start to see a small opening in the rock wall—Virgin River Gorge. For 14 miles, I-15 weaves back and forth through the gorge with rock walls jutting up hundreds of feet on either side of you, with just enough space for the highway and the river.

I am a bit claustrophobic. I don't like tight spaces. But I have to say, I have driven through the Virgin River Gorge on I-15, and it is beautiful. It's spectacular. The desert surrounding the gorge on either side is wide open and very uninteresting. But this narrow gap between the two cliff walls is amazing. It is narrow, but there is beauty in the narrowness.

When we hear Jesus say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," we might think that sounds narrow. And it is. Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is the only way to heaven. He is the only way to be saved. That's narrow. But there is a beauty in the narrowness. And Jesus wants to draw us in with that beauty so we can enjoy it and enjoy him forever.

Do you know the best part? We don't have to wait until we get to heaven to be with Jesus. We get to be with him today. Right here. Right now. He is with us. He is calling us. He is inviting us in. I am the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other way to be saved because salvation is being with me.

What does it look like to respond to this invitation? What does it look like to be with Jesus today?

There are two very basic ways that we can do that. The first is to believe in Jesus. This is what he asks his disciples to do in the face of their lostness in verse 1. "Believe in God. Believe also in me." When we place our faith in Jesus and believe that he is who he says he is, we begin a personal relationship with him—a relationship that starts here and now and continues into eternity. So the first way to be with Jesus is to believe in him.

The second way to be with Jesus is to follow him. The earliest Christians did not call themselves Christians. Instead, they called themselves "followers of The Way." Jesus was a first-century Jewish rabbi (or teacher). In the first century, every Jewish rabbi had a "way." That is, a way to live, a way to treat people, a way to pray, a way to spend your money, and a way to study the Scriptures. They had a way. Jesus had a way. When Jesus claims to be the way, he is saying that his way is The Way. So, the earliest Christians simply called themselves "followers of The Way."

Jesus is inviting us to be followers of The Way as well.

John Mark Comer, a pastor and author from Portland, says it this way:

The task for the Christian is to be with Jesus to learn from Jesus how to be like Jesus. To be with Jesus (that's the destination) so that we can learn from Jesus how to be like Jesus (those are the directions). As our lives begin to look more and more like the life of Jesus, we can be confident that we are on The Way—walking with Jesus on the path to heaven.⁵

Finding your way

I want to end by asking you two important questions to ask yourself, especially when we are feeling lost.

First, Where are you trying to go? If you are feeling lost, maybe it is because you are on your way to the wrong destination in the first place. So, where are you trying to go? Is your ultimate destination a specific place in your career? Is it a certain amount of money in the

bank? Or a certain house in a certain neighborhood? A certain picture of family? Most of these things are good things, but they are not the best things. The best thing is Jesus. He is the place that we should be seeking. So, where are you trying to go?

And the second question: How are you trying to get there? What path are you trying to take to arrive at your intended destination? Are you just trying to be a good person? Do more good than bad? Make the world a better place? That's awesome, but it will not get you to where you need to be—that is, with Jesus for all of eternity. If we want to be with Jesus for all of eternity, we need to seek him here and now. Spending time talking with him and listening to him in prayer and through his Word. We need to be reading the gospel accounts of Jesus' life so that we can model our lives after his. We need to believe in him, trusting that he has the power to save.

Twenty four hours after Jesus said these words, he was hanging on a cross. It looked to all the world that he had lost. I imagine the disciples thinking, No, Jesus! What about your father's house? You were supposed to go and prepare a place for us and come back and take us there! What is happening?

But as Jesus hung on that cross, that is precisely what he was doing: preparing the way for us to be with him forever. He was defeating sin and death. Jesus was paying the debt of our sin. He was giving himself up for us.

Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and conquered the grave. Forty days after that, he ascended into heaven. One day Jesus is coming back to take us to himself so that we can be with him. Because of that, he is worthy of all of our praise and worship. Let's worship him together.

Endnotes

1. Audio Adrenaline, "Big House," Songwriters: Kelly Nickels / Mick Cripps / Philip Lewis / Steve Riley / Tracii Gunns, Universal Music Publishing Group, track number 5 on *Don't Censor Me*, ForeFront Records, 1993.
2. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Second edition (February 11, 2005), Page.

3. Ibid.
4. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne; Revised ed. edition, April 28, 2015).
5. John Mark Comer, "Vision Sunday" (sermon, Bridgetown Church, Portland, OR, September 15, 2019) <https://bridgetown.church/teaching/vision-series-2019/vision-sunday-2/>.

