

“Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven?”

Tough Questions, part #4

John 14:1-14

[title slide] *Welcome and prayer.*

[“YES” slide]

YES

But wait, there’s more.

[rafting] In English class, they told us never ask a close-ended question. In other words, if you want to have a good conversation, don't ask yes or no questions. You will notice that my sermon title is in fact a yes or no question, so I think we need to reframe it. The real question we are asking today is, what is salvation in Jesus Christ?

Let me start with an analogy. I went white-water rafting a few years ago. We were having a great time until we hit a huge rapid and got thrown out of the boat. By the time my head popped up out of the water, I couldn't see anyone. I really wanted to be rescued. I really wanted to be out of the raging current and into the safety of the boat. As I floated downstream, out of the worst part of the rapids, I finally saw my guide, who was in the process of rescuing everyone else who had fallen out of the raft. You have no idea how relieved I was when he hauled me back to safety.

Sometimes, when we are lost in life, it's like that rafting trip. Disaster comes upon us suddenly, and we are overwhelmed. But more often, we become lost little by little. It's like going for a hike in the woods. When you first get going, everything is OK. But subtly, you start to notice that the trees are unfamiliar – or too familiar, when you pass the same tree for the third time. It starts getting dark, you hear noises, and slowly but surely panic sets in. You are lost, and you are desperate for someone to save you and show you the way. Imagine the flood of relief you feel when someone you know comes towards you with a flashlight and leads you home.

[Last Supper] When Jesus said these famous words in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” he was speaking to a group of people who felt panicky. His disciples were worried. Jesus, after walking with them for three years, showing them miracle after miracle, was now talking as if he were going to die soon, which he was. This conversation took place on Thursday night at the Last Supper. On the next day, Good Friday, Jesus would die on the cross. Moments before the scripture we just read, Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, where are you going?” (John 13:36) Jesus answered by telling them he was about to die alone.

The disciples had to process this shocking thought. Jesus, die? Alone? Without them? They were so certain he was the Messiah. How could this be? It is no wonder that Jesus told them, “Don't let your hearts be troubled.” They were troubled! They were lost. They were confused. They were drowning in sorrow. Jesus tried to comfort

them by reassuring them that he was going back to the Father to prepare a place for them, and that they would eventually follow.

But that was not enough for them. Thomas had the guts to tell Jesus what was really troubling him. “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (John 14:5) Thomas wanted clear directions. He wanted a map, GPS, a laser compass and some really big road signs.

Jesus answered with authority and clarity. “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) The disciples wanted to know the Father. In fact, they asked Jesus to show them the Father. And Jesus told them, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)

[Moses & burning bush] The disciples were looking for answers to their problems. They wanted reassurance. They were hungry for a relationship with God, so much, that they asked Jesus to literally show them the Father. That really says something, because in the Bible, when God shows up, it is scary. God hides Moses behind a rock so that Moses won’t be consumed by God’s glory. (Exodus 33:22) When the prophet Isaiah sees God on a throne in heaven, Isaiah thinks, “I’m doomed!” (Isaiah 6:5) Yet, Jesus’ disciples wanted to see God. In reply, Jesus told them if they saw him, they had seen the Father. Jesus was in the Father, and the Father in Jesus.

When we ask, “Is Jesus really the only way to heaven?” we are really not asking the right question. Technically, Jesus said he is the way to the Father. We get so caught up in asking about heaven, we forget the real purpose was for Jesus to make us a way back to God. Heaven is a byproduct of a loving relationship with God.

[Jesus’ hand] Sometimes we get accused in the church of being exclusive. People say, “How can Jesus be the only way to heaven? That leaves out so many people!” But what are they really saying? They are not saying they don’t believe in Jesus. They are really saying, “I will not accept the way God provided me through Jesus.”

Jesus said “I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.” People who misunderstand that statement claim that Christians are exclusive. They hear a negative connotation to this news. They see it as a form of rejection. But actually, Jesus’ statement is inclusive. All are welcome back to the

Father through Jesus. Jesus is the way! That’s good news, because the rest of us are lost, and we haven’t found the way back to God on our own.

[Jesus on the cross] Without Jesus, there would be no way to the Father. Our sin prevents it. We live in a world that is sinful, corrupt, and broken. On any given day, you can read about a war or a disaster somewhere in the world, and it breaks our hearts. The truth is, innocent victims die every day. Families are broken every day. People suffer from injustice, hunger, and violence throughout the world every day. Sin, all of our sin, has caused the world to become lost. We are drowning, and we need help. We are lost, and we need direction.

No other religion claims that God entered the world and suffered on our behalf. The Word of God – Jesus – became flesh, lived among us, and willingly gave up his life on a cross to save us. Christ defeated sin, defeated death, and offered everyone, absolutely everyone, a way back to God.

[Threefold promise] Think about the threefold promise Jesus gave. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” The way – because we have become lost. The truth – because we have encountered lies. Lies like, “I’m not good enough. No one cares about me or loves me. I’m worthless.” Don’t listen to those lies. Listen to the truth. The proof of God’s love is this: Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners. (Romans 5:8) We are forgiven. Jesus also said he is the life. That’s the opposite of what sin brings us. Paul says the wages of sin is death. (Romans 3:23) Jesus gives us life.

Direction. Truth. Life. That is an amazing deal. An incredible deal. For anyone and everyone. Yes, Jesus is the only way to the Father and to a relationship that starts now and continues in heaven. I believe that with all my heart, because of what I read in the Bible. I don’t think that is exclusive at all. Not when Jesus clearly makes that invitation to all.

[compass] Christianity is not about a destination. There is no one in this room who can say, “Finally, I’ve reached perfection. I don’t have to do anything anymore.” Christianity is about a journey. That’s why Jesus said “I am the way.” He didn’t say, “I am the final stop.” When you confess Jesus as Lord, your heavenly GPS does not beep “You have arrived at your destination.” Actually, Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Jesus is the way – for a family to heal from hurt and brokenness. For a world to heal from bitterness and fear. For an addict to recover from substance abuse. For a

church to resurrect itself. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is all we need to know.

[Kneeling at the cross] As a church, do we believe it? Do you hold this truth as a core value? Are we on a journey with Christ? Is it evident in our actions? Does everything we say and do center on the Son of God? If we make this claim, that Jesus is the way, then we should be proclaiming it from the roof tops. This is good news, not bad news. Finally, we have a way to a loving relationship with the Creator.

It is truly a wonderful thing that today is Communion Sunday. Communion is the very essence of the gospel itself. In it we proclaim the forgiveness of God. We give each and every person today a chance to respond to Jesus. We all have the choice. In the next moment, you could come forward for the first time to receive communion, and in that very moment, acknowledge your sins and trust Jesus as Savior. Or you might do it for the fiftieth time.

Let Jesus be your way, your truth, and your life. Don't look for rescue from any other source. Let him be your Savior. And don't keep this invitation for yourself. Share it with someone who also needs saving.

Let's pray.

Memory verse

John 14:6 – Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Reflection questions

1. When have you been lost and needed saving? Who saved you?
2. Why do you think some people view the Christian church as exclusive? Are other religions exclusive as well?
3. To what, exactly, is Jesus the way?
4. How is Jesus the truth?
5. How is he the life?
6. Have you accepted Jesus' invitation for yourself? Have you shared this invitation?