

jesus is the way!

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Scripture Passage John 13:36-14:10

New study guide, may I encourage you in strongest possible way, to read and study ahead each week.

I was a student at the University of Glasgow, studied English literature and philosophy. On the coat of arms of the university you will find the motto of the university, three words in Latin: **Via veritas Vita**. They mean The Way, the Truth, the Life. They come from the Gospel of John and are a quote from Jesus as he describes the core of his being, he is the way, the truth and the Life. I have a feeling that the majority of students and faculty of the university today do not know the origin of the quote, or who said it. If they did, many of them would probably petition to have it changed. But it remains.

It is about 2,000 years ago. Let me take you into an upper room in city of Jerusalem. We are sitting in on a dialogue between Jesus and some friends. It is really a kind of Q and A, question and answer session.

John 13:36
36 Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

37 Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

38 Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

John 14

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God[a]; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

Jesus the Way to the Father

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

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So this passage gives us the context for this great saying. We will look at it over the next 3 Sundays as we explore the identity of Jesus. Each word deserves serious attention to its meaning.

Jesus says I am the way. In one sense a very simple saying, yet any attempt to unpack it, to explore its depth will quickly make us aware just what Jesus might mean by this. There are many lines of thought. We will follow just a few.

A place to begin. Jesus is the way to knowing God.

Possibly no philosopher has articulated an atheistic world view than Frederick Nietzsche, perhaps to be followed in our day by Christopher Hitchens who died recently. Few people have had such a radical impact on the thinking of the 20th century than Nietzsche. He shaped the thinking of Hitler, and through Hitler Mussolini and think for a moment of all the evil that spewed out of their lives. It all came from a life without knowing God.

When our society lies to live in the belief that God is dead, it faces at least three impossible questions.

1 Where does morality come from?

Without God we face the devastating inability to construct an ethical theory for life that is reasonable, consistent and coherent. Parents want schools to have and to teach moral values, but where do we find these slippery values?

2 Where do we find hope?

Without hope we are faced with the sad reality that what we see is all there is. Our human lives are mere fragments of time with no sense of eternity.

3 What is the meaning of life?

The existentialist philosopher Albert Camus and psychologist Victor Frankl who survived the concentration camps both concluded that the search for meaning was the fundamental question for life?

Without meaning and hope, we are consigned to see life as being reduced to the well known lines in Macbeth.

Life is a tale, told by an idiot

Full of sound and fury and signifying nothing.

Dostoevsky is right. If God is dead then everything is permissible.

Ravi Zacharias reminds us: the heaviest price exacted from a society living without God is paid by its young people.

Into this riddle and enigma about life steps Jesus who says I am the way. He is the way to knowing who God is and what he is life.

How Does God reveal himself? Creation is the first way in which God has taken careful steps to declare to us who he is.

The Psalms shout out, the heavens declare the glory of God. Creation is the first revelation of God.

But that only takes us so far.

Then this revelation, this unveiling continues in the words and in the lives and the words of the prophets. Then it comes to a climax in the person of Jesus.

Hebrews 1

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Then Colossians adds, He, Jesus is the image of the invisible God. (Col. 1:15)

Our closest idea to that word, image, lies in the word photograph. Jesus says that he is the photograph of God. That's why he says to Philip, when you see me, when you are looking at me, you are looking at the father.

Jesus sums it up – John 1:18

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Jesus came to explain God, who he is, what he is like. He is the way to understanding the Father.

Back to John 13.

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you

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such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

We do not find the meaning to life apart from God, and we do not really come to know God apart from Jesus.

So much more could be said. We need to take another path.

Jesus is the way to understanding ourselves.

I need to ask you to follow me on what initially may seem like a circuitous path. You might wonder where we are going, but stay with me. This may ask you to think about being a Christian in a new and different way.

Without faith in a personal God, we find ourselves cosmic orphans.

3 kinds of lostness are experienced today.

1 No one is in charge.

We stand today at the top of an enormous pinnacle of scientific discovery and human achievement, but in a moment of panic we suddenly realize that no one is in charge. We become like little children suddenly finding themselves lost in a mall. We struggle with the meaning of our lives feeling that we are orphans in this vast cosmos.

Without the knowledge of a personal God, we discover at the end of our knowledge that we are lost in a cosmic ghost town.

2 We are lost in the vastness of the universe.

We are told that our earth is a tiny speck amidst hundreds of millions of planetary systems. Our galaxy has a diameter of 100,000 light years (remember the velocity of light is 186,000 miles per second), how trivial that makes us today, compared to the person in the middle ages for whom earth was the centre of the universe and heaven was no more than 400 miles up.

3 We are lost as victims of chance.

If evolution is correct and we are no more than the chance occurrence of some cosmic accident, what a crushing defeat this is to our ego and to our search for meaning.

The Bible presents some of the most profound issues in simple pictures.

Our starting point must be to create a proper biblical anthropology, an understanding of who we are based on the Bible.

The Bible sees us, defines us as whole people, a unity of personhood. We are a single being, a seamless tapestry of spiritual and physical. We discover and who know we are only in our relatedness to God. This is called **IMAGO DEI**.

Genesis 1:27
So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Man = humanity not just male. Allow me to use the single term man as meaning humanity.

This verse is three lines of Hebrew poetry giving us both the mystery and the marvel of who we are.

So God created man in his own image.

It calls us to [1] Sanctity – life is a sacred gift.

This protects both the unborn and the elderly or the handicapped. Each of whom can be regarded as a nuisance and to be discarded.

Abortion is the answer of a pragmatic humanistic culture to the issue of an unwanted pregnancy. A new baby can do little for itself, takes a great deal of care. And so if we define identity in terms of pragmatic activity, a new baby has little value, especially if it was unwanted and unplanned.

The same is true of people at the other end of the life spectrum. If we value people only for their activity, what do we do with aged parents no longer able to look after themselves, or still active bodies but whose minds are perhaps now lost in the fog and haze of Alzheimer's. If their identity and value as people is to be measured only by their productivity, there is no room left for them. But if we see people as valuable because God declares them so, then our attitude must be different.

Once we visit God's garden, we discover that identity and value do not lie merely in some human utilitarianism. They flow from the stamp of God, and each new life, from its very beginnings is stamped with the stamp of God – imago dei.

One of the marks of authentic community is to see and endorse each person's value, not on the basis of what they can do (the creed of spiritual

activism), but rather on the essence of who they are, the gospel of spiritual acceptance.

in the image of God he created him

[2] Identity – who I am.

We define and understand who we are only in our relatedness to God rather than in our relatedness to one another. Otherwise we only see ourselves as better than someone, or less than someone else. The essence of our identity comes from our relationship and relatedness to God.

Who am I? What gives my life significance?

Perhaps one of the greatest expressions of the brokenness in our lives today is that we first define ourselves in terms of what we do because we do not know how to define ourselves in terms of who we are.

To put it simply we find it easy to draw our identity from our jobs, from activity, rather than from a vital relationship with God.

One of the gifts God gives us when we visit his garden and walk with him is that he calls us back to the truth that we are relational beings, we are given the capacity to rest, to laugh, to take time off, to life reflectively, there is time to love.

[3] Imago dei gives our lives their sexuality.

male and female he created them.

Imago dei involves our sexuality as male and female. Sex was not something that came after the fall. Our sexuality is part of our creation in the image of God.

We do not choose to be male or female. That is embedded in our essential DNA. But we can choose to be discovered and to develop what it means to be masculine or feminine.

We are not merely an interesting collection of cells. Each life in some unique way is stamped with the hand of God. This is what gives our lives their sense of sacredness. We are a mysterious fusion of body and soul, the physical and the spiritual woven together in this seamless tapestry that we call—being human.

God clothes our sexuality with sanctity. And people who see themselves as whole people can begin to see themselves as holy people.

I feel a deep sadness when I see the young girl at the side of the road. Perhaps wearing a short skirt, standing in a provocative pose. She may think she is only selling her body, what she does not know is that she is selling whole being. She is prostituting her whole self, all of herself, whether she knows it or not.

Sex is not merely something we do. It is who we are! Teenagers and young adults in our culture who feel the pressure to become sexually active need to know that there is no such thing as casual sex. When we engage in sex, it involves our whole being. We are a psychosomatic unity, our spirituality gives depth and dimension to our physical lives, and our physical life earths and incarnates our spiritual nature, saving us from mystical escapism.

All of this and more makes us **IMAGO DEI**, the image of God in us. This is our sacred identity. This is what is broken and distorted in the fall, the good gifts God gives us are twisted and perverted.

So work becomes workholism and eclipses where we find our true identity.

God's gift of sexuality becomes twisted into promiscuity, pornography and prostitution.

Then onto the stage of history comes Jesus. Yes he is the son of God, but he is also the Son of Man. He is fully man as God intended man, humanity, to be. He walks and lives in dependence to God as we were intended to live. He invites us to follow him as the way we were supposed to live.

So who or what is a Christian? Think about this, becoming a Christian, following Jesus, is more than just believing in Jesus so that one day we will go to heaven. It is the way to recovering what it means to be made in the image of God, recovering our true humanness. We are restored to become the kind of people God intended us to be in the first place. Our salvation is not just a way to heaven, but it is the way to live on earth.

Christians are to be fully human people, enjoying the life God intended us to have, and Jesus is the key to that.

Colossians 3:10
But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9

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Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Our new self is the restoration of being made in the image of God, and Jesus is the way to know all that this means.

To be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus, does not make us some spiritual superperson, rather it recovers for us what it means to be made in the image of God. Jesus opens up the way to this new discovery. Being a Christian is the way to recover what it means to be a truly human person.

Finally, Jesus is the way to heaven and how we get there.

We can survive without a lot of things, but we cannot survive without hope. Sometimes we glibly say as long as there's life there hope. It would actually be better if we turned that around and say as long as there's hope there's life.

Above the entrance to hell in Dante's inferno was the inscription, abandon hope all ye who enter here.

Some years ago, Harriet and I were privileged to visit Egypt. Went to the Egyptian museum in Cairo, saw all the chariots, gold, furniture and personal possessions that a Pharaoh would take with him into the afterlife. Sometimes even the wives and servants were entombed with them.

Against the shadowy opinions and uncertain beliefs that many people have about life after death. Jesus says, **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."**

One thing is certain about each of our lives. One day we will all die, lots of people try to explore all the details of what that will be like, and what lies ahead. But much of it still remains a mystery to us. It seems to me that we should want to be surprised by the awesome beauty of heaven.

Remember, Jesus had lived there before. He knew what it was like and so he knew what lay ahead of him on the other side of the cross. He knew where he was going. That's why he says in John 17 father, glorify, me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world was.

So if you want to stand on your tiptoes and catch just a glimpsed of what lies ahead, then here is a hint, a preview as far as the human eye can see.

Revelation 21

1 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

That's the kind of place that Jesus says he is going to prepare for us.

So if we are seriously looking for the way to know God, Jesus says I am the way. If we are looking to find the meaning in life, Jesus says, I am the way. If we are looking for a way to find hope to live and assurance to face death, Jesus says I am the way.